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GREAT BRITAIN'S WITHDRAWAL FROM THE
PERSIAN GULF 1968-1971:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE POLICY AND THE PROCESS

David James McMunn

GREAT BRITAIN'S WITHDRAWAL FROM THE PERSIAN
GULF 1968-1971: AN ANALYSIS OF THE POLICY
AND THE PROCESS

A Dissertation
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts

By

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//

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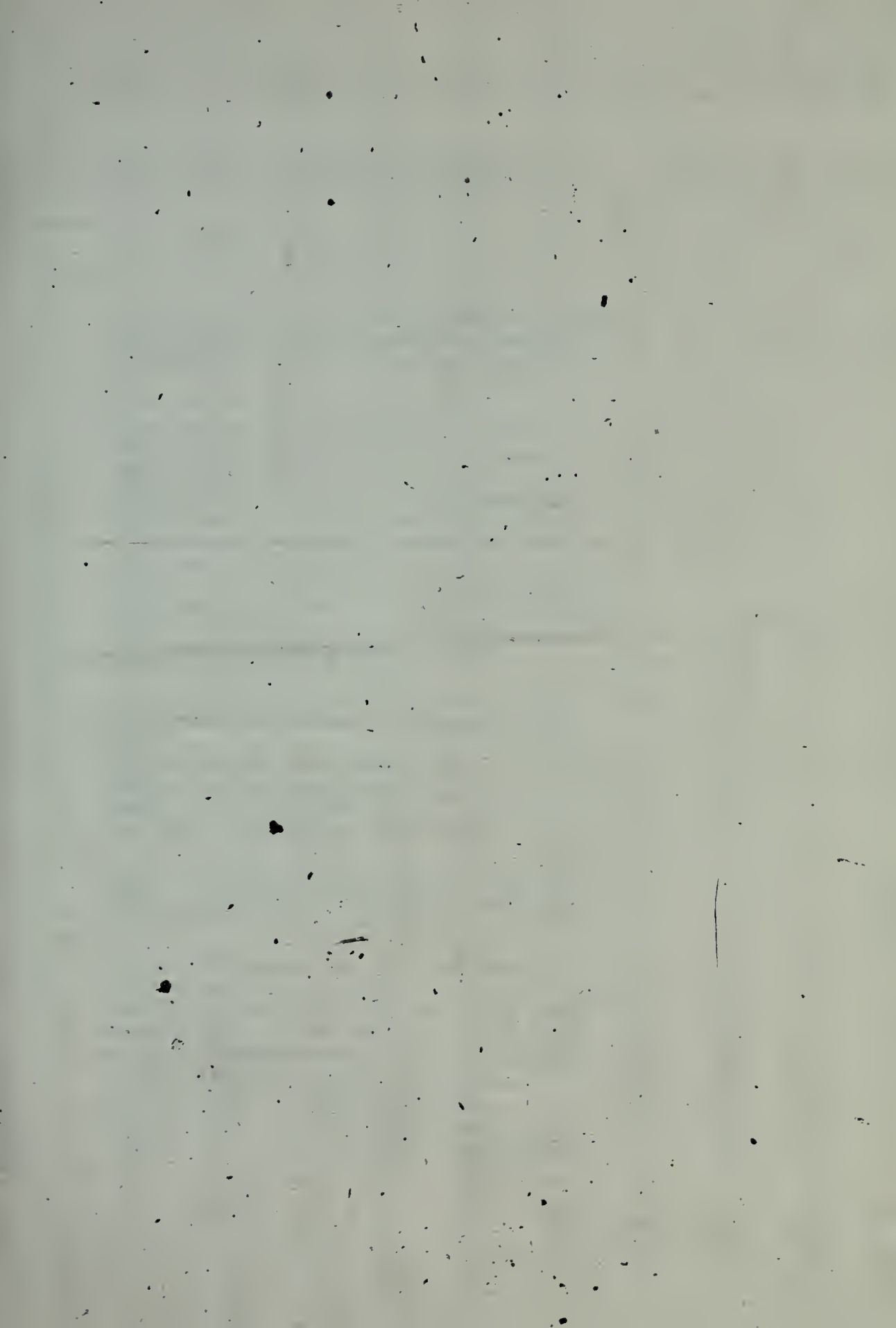


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PREFACE

Great Britain announced her impending withdrawal from the Persian Gulf while I was resident on Bahrain, assigned as a staff officer to the U.S. Commander, Middle East Force. At the time neither myself nor my neighbors, whether British or Bahraini, seemed particularly impressed by that news. Perhaps in early 1968 none of us really believed it would happen. Of course it did.

In this belated effort to understand the policy and process of the British withdrawal as it occurred from 1968 to 1971, I have come to the realization of its profound significance, both to Britain and to the states of the Gulf. I found those brief four years of intense activity to be no island in time, but rather a critical phase in the continuum of western society's interaction with the peoples of the Middle East. In this broader perspective, the withdrawal policy and process was as much an extension of the past as a transition for the future.

My new awareness chiefly derives from insights provided by generous men, diplomats and scholars. Of

course I alone am responsible for the views expressed
in this work.

Sir William Luce and Sir Geoffry Arthur were
especially helpful. Mr. Anthony Reeve's advice and
assistance was invaluable. My mentor in every sense of
that word was Professor John S. Badeau. To him I owe
the unrepayable debt of student to teacher. To these
men and to the others who helped me in so many ways,
I express my sincere appreciation.

A Note on Transliteration from Arabic to
English. In the following pages, certain Arabic names
and words have been transliterated into English. No
systematic procedure was employed in the process,
except to adopt the most common usages and spellings
accepted by the sources.

CHAPTER ONE

BRITAIN'S "SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP" WITH THE PERSIAN GULF SHAIKHDOMS AND HER DECISION TO END THE TREATY SYSTEM

The Problem

In January 1968, the British Government announced its intention to withdraw its military forces from the Persian Gulf within four years. This decision signalled a dramatic policy shift, and came as a disconcerting surprise to the Rulers of the shaikhdoms that had shared a "special relationship" with Her Majesty's Government for nearly one and one-half centuries. Not only had the British been treaty bound to manage all external affairs for Bahrain, Qatar and the Trucial States, but London's Political Residents and Agents had advised the leaders of those Gulf dependencies in virtually all areas of governmental administration. Now that association was to be terminated within four years and the shaikhdoms would be left on their own, the situation raised the question: how would Great Britain continue to pursue her national interests in the region, while adapting to her changed

international relationship with the Persian Gulf States? This study seeks to identify her interests, review the measures taken to protect them after the disengagement, and to gauge the results of Britain's withdrawal procedure in that context.

The diplomatic and military officials at Whitehall had to implement the 1968 decision. Transcendent national interests were readily apparent to them. The mundane realities of domestic, regional and international politics that also applied were not. Yet the manner in which those men contended with and resolved the many quandaries confronted in the course of withdrawal deeply influenced the Gulf Great Britain's forces left behind.

In 1973, fourteen months after the formal British departure, a U.S. Congressman noted:

. . . never before in the history of mankind have so many wealthy industrialized, militarily powerful and large states been at the potential mercy of small, independent, and potentially unstable states which will provide, for the foreseeable future, the fuel of advanced societies.¹

To understand the process through which Britain tried

¹Lee Hamilton, Vital Speeches 39:8 (1 February 1973): 239. Reprint of speech given on 11 January 1973 before the U.S. House of Representatives.

to prepare her Protectorates for that heady status, the pre-1968 Treaty System with Gulf will be described. Emphasis is placed on its modern development and character. The rationale for the British decision to terminate that durable and profitable system will then be examined. Against this background, the withdrawal policy and process of Her Majesty's Government will be analyzed, identifying specific diplomatic, military and administrative challenges under both Labor and a Conservative Party leadership. Finally the performance will be assessed, actual accomplishments appraised, and the long-term service to Great Britain's national interests in the Gulf analyzed.

Foundations of the Treaty System

Before examining the policy and process of British withdrawal from the Gulf, it is necessary to explain Great Britain's role there prior to 1968. It began in conjunction with the European trade expansion from the sixteenth century onwards, from which the British East India Company emerged in the late Eighteenth century. It was the foremost foreign interest operating along the Persian Gulf littoral. The European rivalries had coincided with conflicts

between Ottoman, Persian and Czarist Russian empires. Equally pertinent was the burgeoning Wahhabi revolution that swept the Arabian peninsula. The combined impact of the various confrontations had generated a reassertion of the indigenous Arab presence in the Gulf. That appeared as "piracy" to British eyes. Already anxious about Napoleon's eastward and Russian southern ambitions,² a series of East India Company officials had adopted an increasingly hard line toward any threat to British India. The relatively minor commercial impact of the Arab "pirates" thus assumed political significance, and several punitive expeditions were launched against them during the first two decades of the Nineteenth Century. These culminated with the forced signing of the General Treaty for the Cessation of Plunder and Piracy in March 1820.³ This initiated what came to be called the Trucial or Treaty

²These fears precipitated a series of diplomatic maneuvers in the Gulf, beginning with the Anglo-Omani qualnamah of 1798, see J. C. Hurewitz, Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East: A Diplomatic Record, I (New York: Van Nostrand Co., Inc., 1956), p. 64, for text. J. B. Kelly, Britain and the Persian Gulf: 1795-1880 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), details the process.

³Text of Treaty contained in C. O. Aitchison, A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads . . . II (Delhi: Govt of India, 1933), p. 245.

System in the Gulf. Donald Hawley captures the essence of that Anglo-Arab relationship by designating this the first commandment: "thou shalt not commit piracy against British shipping." Thirty-three years later, the second commandment was embodied in another British-prescribed treaty: "thou shalt not commit piracy against each other." In 1892, the trilogy was completed as London decreed, "thou shalt not deal with any foreign power except the British Government."⁴ Throughout the Nineteenth Century this deepening Gulf involvement reflected primarily the European continental rivalries. It occurred despite a conscious effort by British officials to avoid being caught up in Arab internal affairs. Sir John Lawrence, Viceroy in India, exemplified that attitude in a letter to his Bombay Governor in 1866. He wrote:

If I have any influence on . . . policy, I should advise that we interfere as little as may be possible in the affairs of the Arab tribes on the seaboard, and of course still less with those of the tribes of the interior . . .⁵

⁴Donald Hawley, The Trucial States (London: Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1970), p. 18.

⁵Ravinder Kumar, India and the Persian Gulf Region, 1858-1907 (London: Asia Publishing House, 1965), p. 39.

Lord Palmerston later defended that policy this way: "Turkey is as good a guardian of the route to India as any Arab would be."⁶ But such blithe reliance on the sick man of Europe proved to be untenable. In 1871, the Pasha of Baghdad dispatched an anti-Saudi expedition onto the Arabian peninsula, requiring Britain to come to the aid of her threatened clients at Bahrain and Oman.⁷ Later in the century, a rising Germany launched an aggressive 'Drang nach Osten' with an attempt to terminate the Berlin-to-Baghdad railway at Kuwait. That brought in the Royal Navy, the messianic imperialist Lord Curzon, and a secret Anglo-Kuwait agreement that even further ensconced Great Britain in the Gulf.⁸ By the end of the century, the Treaty System had been formalized.

Maritime treaties had been supplemented with political arrangements, and ultimately economic concessions were granted, giving Britain preferential

⁶Elizabeth Monroe, Britain's Moment in the Middle East 1914-1956 (London: Chatto & Windus, 1964), p. 14.

⁷R. Bayly Winder, Saudi Arabia in the Nineteenth Century (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), pp. 252-254.

⁸See George Kirk, A Short History of the Middle East, 6th ed. (London: Methuen, 1966), p. 93. Also

treatment in the quest for oil. The Rulers of the Trucial States, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain had surrendered their sovereign rights to

1. establish diplomatic relations with any foreign power
2. negotiate treaties with any foreign power but Britain
3. cede territory without British approval
4. cede mineral or oil exploratory rights without British approval.⁹

Britain's role in the Gulf, created in response to diverse and seemingly isolated incidents, gradually became an important underpinning for her empire.

The Modern Era

Ironically, the Treaty System outlasted its raison d'etre, for India secured her independence in

see Hurewitz, op. cit., I, pp. 218-219, for treaty details.

⁹Times (London) (Special Report: Britain and the Gulf), 16 December 1971, p. II. (Husain al Baharra). Also see H. al Baharra, The Legal Status of the Arabian Gulf States (London: Manchester Union Press, 1968), for extensive treatment of the Treaty System's legal aspects. An interesting note, Sir Percy Cox actually had secured a similar relationship with Abdul Aziz ibn Saud in 1915, but this did not last. See J. C. Hurewitz, Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East: A Documentary Record 1914-1956, Vol. II (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1956), p. 427.

1948. That the "removal of the hub" did not lead "to an immediate reconsideration of the role of the spokes," as Phillip Darby has noted, can be traced to a combination of inertia, and more tangibly, to oil.¹⁰ Whitehall tended to justify its continued presence in the Persian Gulf after World War II strategically, tying it to the "unexplored British commitment" in the Indian Ocean that formed the "starting point and not the subject of analysis."¹¹ The oil was no mere rationalization. Since 1932, when the first commercially-producing well was brought in on Bahrain,¹² Britain's relations with the shaikhs had been geared to that highly profitable and industrially essential commodity. World War II had intervened, postponing commensurate administrative realignments. Only afterwards, in 1946, could the British Government remove the shaikhdoms from their Government of India's

¹⁰British Defense Policy East of Suez 1947-1968 (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 9.

¹¹Ibid., p. 57.

¹²Benjamin Shwadran, The Middle East, Oil and the Great Powers, 1959, 2nd ed. (New York: Council for Middle Eastern Affairs Press, 1959), p. 374.

"zone of influence." They were first placed under H. M. India Office. Later, the Commonwealth Relations Office absorbed the India Office in 1947, and in 1948 Britain's activities in the Persian Gulf were finally brought directly under Foreign Office pervue.¹³

Administrative Organization

The Foreign Office position in the Protectorates was largely formulated and supervised by the Political Residency on Bahrain, and exercised through Political Agencies in Bahrain, Dubai, Kuwait (until 1961), Doha and (from 1957) Abu Dhabi.¹⁴ The Political Resident carried ambassadorial rank, administered extra-territorial jurisdiction over all non-Moslems and over Moslem subjects of Commonwealth countries, and was Commander-in-Chief of the Trucial Oman Scouts. His responsibilities touched every aspect of Britain's role in the Gulf, including education, monetary exchange, transportation, and communication. Sir Rupert Hay, who was eight years the Political Resident during the

¹³ Hawley, p. 168.

¹⁴ See J. B. Kelly, Britain and the Persian Gulf: 1795-1880 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 911. These offices were descended from East India Company factory agents, which had been located in Bushire,

1950s, contended that oil transactions occupied most of his official time. He "closely watched" all negotiations,

to make sure that nothing is decided which will seriously affect the position of the Rulers or the British Government. . ."

In essence, the Political Resident was a coordinator on behalf of Her Majesty's Government. Routine direct dealings with individual Rulers were handled by the Political agents, whose "close personal contact maintained /with/ the Rulers is the outstanding feature of the British position in the Persian Gulf."¹⁵ These men controlled the right of foreign businessmen to enter the area through the device called "N.O.C." (No Objection Certificate), as Britain performed even consular and visa functions for her protectorates.¹⁶

The Deepening British Involvement

All of these officers were ostensibly in place to promote Maritime Peace, but the modern technological complexities impinged on that uncomplicated ideal,

Bandar Abbas, and Basra.

¹⁵Hay, p. 20.

¹⁶Joseph Malone, Arab Lands of Western Asia (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1973), p. 235.

even more than had the political-military considerations mentioned above (see page 6). As early as 1864, the first telegraph lines were installed,¹⁷ and the replacement of flying boats by land planes required Civil Air Agreements between Great Britain and the shaikhdoms by the 1930s. Then too, the discovery of oil in commercial quantity furthered the landward penetration by British interests. Former Gulf Political Officer, Donald Hawley, wrote,

Exploration was held up by the war but, after it, British attention to the progress of the oil companies necessitated a far closer interest in internal affairs than had previously been paid.¹⁸

That "closer interest" meant protecting oil exploration parties from Bedouin potshots and marauding tribal warriors, and greater attention to territorial disputes that now rested on the enormous sub-surface wealth.¹⁹ Between 1945 and 1948, the interior was even more unsettled by a war between the Bani Yas shaikhdoms

¹⁷See Christina Phelps Harris, "The Persian Gulf Submarine Telegraph of 1864," The Geographical Journal 135 (June 1969): 169-190.

¹⁸Hawley, p. 173.

¹⁹Times (London), 15 November 1971, p. 11. (Charles Douglas Home).

of Abu Dhabi and Dubai. The dispute was basically territorial, exacerbated by intra-tribal animosities that spanned more than a century.²⁰ This typified the traditional unrest that also pitted the maritime Quawasim of Ras al Khaima and Sharjah against one another, or against their desert-oriented neighbors, in what can best be described as a fluid system of alliances. The Omani tribes had no monopoly on conflicts. Qatar's territorial dispute with Abu Dhabi was also serious, but that was eclipsed by their Zubarra dispute with Bahrain. The famed advisor to the al Khalifa's for more than a quarter century, Sir Charles Belgrave, insisted that this Zubarra question "took up more time and presented more difficulties than any of the problems with which I had to deal."²¹ Because of oil, Sir Charles' countrymen in the Foreign Office would no longer indulge in the luxury of non-involvement.²² After 1948, some "profound rethinking on

²⁰John Duke Anthony, "The Union of Arab Amirates," Middle East Journal 26 (Summer 1972):279.

²¹Sir Charles Belgrave, Personal Column: Autobiography (London: Hutchinson, 1960), p. 152.

²²Patrick Bannerman, Foreign Office Research Department, interview held in his Whitehall office, London, 25 October 1973.

Britain's part" followed the Political Resident's failure to halt the fighting that brought Shaikh Rashid, leader of Dubai's army (and later Vice President of the United Arab Emirates), against Shaikh Zayed, leader of Abu Dhabi forces (and later President of the UAE).

Formation of the Trucial Oman Scouts

The means to enforce British policy was lacking, and this could no longer be tolerated. The stakes were too high. The decision was taken to create a constabulary, the Trucial Oman Levies, by seconding British and Jordanian officers from General Glubb's Arab Legion. This was to provide an "effective right arm" for Britain's political authorities. The Levies would protect the geologists and guard the peace that was now a prerequisite for furthering Britain's economic interests in the Gulf.

What changed the Levies from a mobile gendarmerie into a small army was "Buraimi."²⁴ "The

²³Hawley, p. 174.

²⁴The term "Buraimi" is used here because of its popular usage in referring to the dispute. In fact, the Buraimi Oasis includes nine villages, four in Oman and five in Abu Dhabi. Al Ain is the chief Abu Dhabi

positions of the Governments of Great Britain (on behalf of Abu Dhabi and Oman) and Saudi Arabia are elaborated in the "Memorials," both submitted for litigation before an International Tribunal at Geneva.²⁵

To summarize the incident, there had been a long-standing disagreement over control of the oasis between the Sultan of Muscat, the Ruler of Abu Dhabi, and the King of Saudi Arabia. This flared up with the breakdown of ongoing negotiations in London and Dammam, between British (on behalf of their clients) and Saudi officials. The local Saudi governor, Amir Turki ibn Ataishan, unexpectedly occupied the Buraimi village of Hamara in 1952. For three years both sides feinted and threatened, though they eventually agreed to international arbitration of the problem.

Again oil lay at the proverbial bottom of the territorial dispute. ARAMCO and IPC were competing for drilling rights over what had been a refuge oasis and
 village and a major population center.

²⁵See Arbitration Concerning Buraimi and the Common Frontier between Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia: Memorial Submitted by the Government of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (London: HMSO, 1955). The Saudi side was presented in Arbitration for the Settlement of the Territorial Dispute between Muscat and Abu Dhabi on the One Side and Saudi Arabia on the Other: Memorial of the Government of Saudi Arabia, 3 vols.

watering hole for the nomadic tribes of varied and fluctuating political allegiance. In 1955, amid mutual recriminations, and some blatant bribery attempts by the over-zealous Saudis, the Belgium Resident of the International Tribunal finally resigned in disgust. British Prime Minister Anthony Eden then ordered the Trucial Oman Levies (later called Scouts) to occupy the oasis in October 1955.²⁶

In 1951, there had been only two hundred men. Now, five hundred strong, they forcibly evicted the Saudi forces. By 1968, the ~~Trucial Oman Scouts would~~ number 1,600 local tribesmen, led by thirty-one seconded British and twenty-nine Arab, (mostly Jordanian) officers. Backed by evident fire-power, they fulfilled their charter, acting as peacemakers and lawyers in disputes over well rights, goat-grazing and frontiers.²⁷ Behind them Britain's land, sea and

Vol. I: Text, Cairo:n.p., 1955.

²⁶See J. J. Malone, Arab Lands, pp. 153-159, and 219-220. Hawley, pp. 186-193. Wendell Phillips, Oman: A History (London: Longmans, 1967) offers Oman's perspective, and Leonard Mosley, Power Play: Oil in the Middle East (New York: Random House, 1973), pp. 235-246, has overview.

²⁷"Going, going. . . .," The Economist (Special Survey of the Arabian Peninsula) (6 June 1970):34.

air forces stood ready. 7

The Role of Britain's Armed Forces
in the Persian Gulf: Modern Era

In 1952, the old fort at Fujairah had been bombarded by a Royal Navy man-of-war to force the release of slaves.²⁸ Elsewhere, Britain's air power had been employed

to quell local disturbances by pin-point attacks on local points such as forts, supply bases, or buildings occupied by dissident groups or local dignitaries.²⁹

In 1957, H. M. Middle East Command was excluded from a massive defense cut-back, because the Government believed they "must at all times be ready to defend Aden Colony and the Protectorates and the Territories on the Persian Gulf."³⁰ Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd reiterated Her Majesty's treaty obligation to protect the shaikhdoms,³¹ a commitment that was quickly tested

²⁸Hay, p. 129.

²⁹Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th series, vol. 542 (1955):111.

³⁰Great Britain, Ministry of Defense, Statement on Defense Estimates (Command 124) 3 April 1957, as reprinted in Brassey's Annual: The Armed Forces Yearbook, 1957 (London: Clower, 1957), p. 335.

³¹Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th series, vol. 5731 (1957):107. J

in the remote highlands of Oman. There, a full-scale revolt broke out on the Jabel Akhdar in 1957. This led to the permanent provision of British advisors to the Sultan's Armed Forces, a consequential move as will be discussed in Chapter Four. Though the limits of conventional power were revealed in Oman, the revolt was suppressed.³² Advocates of increasing British forces in the Gulf cited the Anglo-Iranian showdown of 1951, and, ten years later, Britain's defense of newly independent Kuwait, to vindicate the military 'presence'. In both cases the imminent threat of British arms had preserved access to the precious petroleum. Moreover, persistent Persian claims to Gulf islands under British protection, including the most advanced of the shaikhdoms, Bahrain, was considered ample justification for even greater troop levels in the area.³³ By 1961, 8,000 British military personnel were stationed in the Middle East,³⁴ and up

³²Darby, pp. 130-132.

³³John Marlowe, "Arab-Persian Rivalry in the Persian Gulf," Royal Central Asian Society Journal 51 (January 1964):23-31.

³⁴Times (London), 16 May 1963.

to 5,000 of them were placed under then Political Resident, William Luce, to defend newly independent Kuwait.³⁵ After withdrawal from Aden in 1968, there were still 6,500 "studiedly inconspicuous" British military men in the Gulf.³⁶

Indigenous Organizational Development in the Shaikhdom

Another major British innovation of the early 1950s was the Trucial States Council. Therein the Rulers of the seven Trucial States met semi-annually to discuss matters of mutual interest and advise on expenditures of Britain's Trucial Development Fund. From its relatively inauspicious beginning, the forum evolved to become the nucleus of federal planning, though "it was never part of Britain's policy to attempt to force them in this direction."³⁷ By 1965, the Council's chairmanship, always held by the Political Agent, was relinquished to the Ruler of Ras al Khaima, no doubt a compromise choice, and British

³⁵New York Times, 4 July 1961.

³⁶"Going, going. . . ." p. 34.

³⁷Hawley, p. 178.

influence in subsequent Council deliberations waned. Under the Council, Rulers had also established a Trucial States Development Office (TSDO) to administer development projects, including piping water and electricity, road building and educational projects. Still the TSDO was less an indigenous than an external agency.³⁸ The United Kingdom provided its British acting-Director, and most of its funding, (£1 million in 1968).³⁹ The Foreign Office's Overseas Development Administration also contributed £200,000 toward a Gulf Technical College on Bahrain. In addition, London supplied the school's £60,000 annual running expenses, and the salaries of sixteen British expatriates teaching there. From the British Ministry of Defense, costs for sea, air and meteorological facilities on Bahrain alone exceeded £1 million and their annual maintenance was borne entirely by the British taxpayer.⁴⁰ RAF and army expenditures in

³⁸Times (London) (Special Report) 16 December 1970, p. III.

³⁹K. G. Fenelon, The Trucial States: A Brief Economic Survey 2nd rev. ed. (Beirut: Khayats, 1969), pp. 39-42.

⁴⁰Times (London), (Special Report: Britain and the Gulf), 16 December 1970, p. IV (Ralph Izzard).

Sharjah were also considerable and are not reflected as direct British financial support to the shaikhdoms. Further mitigating the impact of the Trucial States Development Office were large funds expended unilaterally by third countries. These included Kuwait's Fund for Arab Economic Development, Saudi Arabian aid, and even projects undertaken by individual shaikhs outside the federal concept, particularly Abu Dhabi's and Qatar's rulers.

The Treaty System in the 1960s

By 1968, the British role had clearly been diluted, the inevitable result of modernization and an unprecedented economic bonanza. But it was neither insignificant nor inhibiting. Sir William Luce, Political Resident from 1960 to 1966, is accused by some of following

the time-honored British policy, where Arabs are concerned, of never interfering with the local rulers except to encourage rivalries between them--this tactic being sufficient to keep them divided and therefore unlikely to kick the British out.⁴¹

This accusation ignores two fundamental facts. First, for generations Gulf Arabs had been conditioned to

⁴¹ Mosley, p. 458.

intrigue, to hate, to distrust each other. They ruled by siasi, i.e. political machinations, tribal wars, assassinations and threats. No encouragement was needed to maintain that tradition. Perhaps the insulation of Britain's presence did prolong this, but even when united and friendly relations prevailed, the Rulers showed no inclination to dissolve their British connections. Second, the "special relationships" did not give Britain the subtle manipulative power implied by the accusation. Upon his appointment to the Gulf, Sir William Luce, experienced in colonial administration in the Sudan and at Aden, was himself surprised at the statutory limits on a Political Resident attempting to direct events under the Treaty System. Even the British connivance in the depositions of rulers was more in reaction to, than in direction of extraordinary circumstances. "Britain's advice was ignored more often than not,"⁴² and increasingly so as wealth and sophistication accrued to the shaikhs. Yet both the British Government and the Arab Amirs perceived an advantage in their evolving, still

⁴²

Sir William Luce, interview held at the Bath Club, London, 24 October 1973.

sympiotic association.⁴³ 7

The International Arena

As with most political issues, however, the "special relationship" in the Persian Gulf was controversial. Great Britain had survived the ravages of World War II, bombed and battered. Her people had nearly seen foreign domination from the other side, and they knew it. Economically, her industries tottered, while her imperial veins seemed to sap rather than strengthen the homeland. New ideas of nationalism and self-government had permeated her colonies. At home, many argued for integration with Europe, even as the heirs of Pitt and Palmerston were subjected abroad to a dreary litany of hastily-drawn constitutions and flag-lowering ceremonies all across the once mighty empire. In the Near East, the enervating Palestinian question gave way to Nasser's Egypt, culminating with the explosion of British frustrations at Suez in 1956. Taken together, these bitter

⁴³Some negative aspects of Britain's limited influence are documented by Martin Page, "Middle East II: Persian Gulf," Atlantic 219 (April 1967):38-42. Therein the deterioration of the traditional system of rule by the Shaikhs is outlined, with its associated political and social abuse of power, despite British humanitarian advise. J

realities seemed to isolate, to expose as an obsolete anachronism, the British position and policy in the Persian Gulf as she entered the decade of the 1960s.

In the context of the Cold War, that same position never seemed too necessary. As Harold Haskins wrote in 1967:

That a Western power structure was needed East of Suez was made apparent not so much by the loss of positions of strength in the Mediterranean, as by the easterly trend of Egyptian designs under Soviet sponsorship, Iraqi-Iranian clashes over navigation rights in the Shatt-al-Arab, increasing restiveness in Iran, and growing assertiveness of oil-wealthy Persian Gulf shaikhdoms . . .⁴⁴

Harold Wilson, speaking before the House of Commons in June of 1964, declared:

The peace-keeping role, which will over the next generation be the main contribution of this country to world affairs--peace-keeping on behalf of the Commonwealth, of the Western alliance and of the United Nations--will mean a very big role for this country east of Suez.⁴⁵

Compared to the old imperial glories, however illusory they may have been, this offered a sorry psychological

⁴⁴Harold Hoskins, "Changing of the Guard in the Middle East," Current History, 52 (February 1967):69.

⁴⁵Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (Commons, 5th series, vol. 696 (1964):1403.

surrogate for the heavy burden that presence implied. Still, the Labor Party leader had touched the mood of his countrymen. Smitten by the 1963 rebuff by Charles DeGaulle of their bid to join the Common Market, Wilson's constituency emphasized the non-European approach to British foreign policy.

The Decision to Withdraw

The elections of 1964 provide a convenient watershed from which to begin an analysis of the decision to withdraw from the Gulf. Both the Tory and the Labor Party platforms reflected the national predilection to look beyond the continent of Europe to Britain's destiny. When Wilson's party won, the new government was clearly intent upon "maintaining a role--not merely a presence--along the former imperial line to the East."⁴⁶ The new Prime Minister's assured his countrymen that no economic constraints would force him to relinquish "our world role . . . sometimes called our "East of Suez" role . . ."⁴⁷ The Economist

⁴⁶Hoskins, p. 70.

⁴⁷Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th series, vol. 704 (1964): 4234.

reported that

the British government apparently intends to ask its allies for permission to regard the Rhine Army as a part of a reserve that can be switched to the Indian Ocean if need be.⁴⁸

The revitalized interest in British fortunes east of Suez saw businessmen and diplomats alike involved in an aggressive, updated version of the Drang nach Osten. By December 1965, they had secured a \$300 million contract to provide Saudi Arabia a package air defense system, outbidding their surprised American counterparts. This capped a "slow comeback in the Arab world since the Anglo, French and Israeli attack on Egypt in 1956."⁴⁹

It appeared a new era of British influence had dawned. It was therefore somewhat disconcerting to find a pessimistic note in the 1965 Defense White Paper, hinting at eventual force reductions in Europe and east of Suez because of budgetary considerations.⁵⁰ Reaction came swiftly. The Times editorialized that

⁴⁸"East of Suez, West of Suez," The Economist, 114 (February 6, 1965): 512.

⁴⁹J. A. Morris, "Britain Beats U.S. on \$300 Million Saudi Arms Deal," Washington Post (December 11, 1965), p. A15.

⁵⁰The Times (London), 14 February 1965, p. 1.

It would be politically irresponsible and economically wasteful if our bases were abandoned, while they were still needed to promote peace in the areas concerned . . .

The influential daily stressed the unique contribution to peace by Her Majesty's forces "in vast areas of the world where no other country was able to assume the same responsibility."⁵¹ Defense Secretary Denis Healey assured the House of Commons of his Government's ongoing commitment to fund a large military force in the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf:

I would point out that the justification of our military presence east of Suez is not the building of a wall against Communist. Nor is it for the protection of selfish British economic interests. It is essentially the maintenance of peace and stability in parts of the world where sudden withdrawal of colonial rule has too often left the local peoples unable to maintain stability without some sort of external aid.⁵²

Yet, later in the same Parliamentary debate over this, Labor's first comprehensive statement of defense policy, Mr. Healey was pressed for details on just how his ideas would be implemented. His answer was revealing. Such matters could not be publicly

⁵¹Ibid., p. 17.

⁵²Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th series, vol. 707 (1965):1337-1338.

⁵³Ibid., col. 1356.

discussed, said the Defense Secretary, because of the need for "not damaging either our security or weakening the morale of our forces." Those men were "seriously underequipped and under-manned," and further disclosures in the White Paper could not improve, but certainly could jeopardize, their situation.⁵³ Thoughtful listeners may well have begun to doubt the real capabilities of the British military in the Gulf no matter how noble their proclaimed purpose for being there.

A more fundamental question than tactical readiness was also raised at this time. Could the military stationed east of Suez positively affect British interests under any foreseeable circumstances, regardless of financial costs? As Elizabeth Monroe had observed, they had hardly stemmed the anti-British tide of Arab Nationalism and non-alignment, nor had they prevented

discrimination against the oil companies, . . . as was proved at Abadan. It is the need for steady income, with which to pay for the benefits that they have promised their peoples, that prompts all up-to-date

⁵⁴Elizabeth Monroe, "British Bases in the Middle East: Assets or Liabilities," International Affairs, 42 (January 1965): 27.

producing countries to do all they can to keep production up, sales steady and prices as high as possible in a hotly competitive market."⁵⁴

Given such cogent reasons for altering the status quo, several alternative defense policies had been suggested. Only six months prior to his assuming the Prime Ministry, Harold Wilson told a university audience in Bridgeport, Connecticut, that although "we must effectively fulfill our commitments in Europe, we felt that there would be a need to transfer naval budgetary resources from strategic nuclear to conventional strength."⁵⁵ This seemed to have been accepted in November 1965. Britain announced the purchase of four Indian Ocean islands (Diego Garcia, Farquhar, Aldabra and Des Roches, from Mauritius and the Seychelles) to form the British Indian Ocean Territory (B.I.O.T.). Costing \$8,400,000, the sparsely populated new holdings were to provide a naval base for Royal Navy aircraft carriers and submarines. A huge strategic communications center was also proposed for the idyllic tropical locale.⁵⁶ Britain's action was

⁵⁵Quoted in "British Arms and the Switch Towards Europe," Neville Brown, International Affairs 43 (July 1967): 27.

⁵⁶Time, 86-21, 19 November 1965, p. 26.

hailed as "a reaffirmation of her interest in the whole area east of Suez," from which the U.S. Defense Department "strongly opposed any British pullout . . ."⁵⁷ An indication as to the American desire for a continuing British presence may be seen in the fact that the U.S. picked up the tab for B.I.O.T., the U.S. being the only western state with "the physical and financial resources required . . ."⁵⁸ Clearly, B.I.O.T. represented a new direction in British defense policy east of Suez.

Internal Dissention

Within months of the B.I.O.T. announcement came yet another manifestation of major policy changes. Both the Navy Minister and the Lord of the Admiralty (Sir William Luce's brother, David) resigned their positions in January 1966. They objected to the policies that were first published by their Ministry in the 1966 White Paper on Defense the following month. Drastic cuts in military expenditures were proclaimed. These included the phasing out of the fleet air arm

⁵⁷New York Times, 11 November 1965, p. 1.

⁵⁸Hoskins, "Changing of the Guard . . .," p.

by the 1970s. The rationale was allegedly economic. 7

The defense policy of the future would mean:

Britain will not undertake major operations of war except in cooperation with allies . . . will not provide another country with military assistance unless . . . it provides us with the facilities we need to make such assistance effective in time . . . (and will) make no attempt to maintain defense facilities in an independent country against its will . . .⁵⁹

The highest naval officials did not leave simply to protest the decision to build no more carriers. Instead, they believed that move to be "incompatible with our sustaining a major military role east of Suez . . ."⁶⁰ Lord Mayhew called that presence "the prime cause of insolvency" and chief obstacle to Britain's joining the Common Market."⁶¹ His objections sparked a lively debate in Commons. The shadow Defense Minister, Enoch Powell, demanded to know just how the Labor Party proposed to fulfill its stated commitments, considering the White Paper's sweeping reductions. He reminded his colleagues that strategic land bases were

⁵⁹Great Britain, Ministry of Defense, The Defense Review, February 1966, Command 2901.

⁶⁰Brown, "British Arms and the Switch . . .," p. 469.

⁶¹Christopher Mayhew, Britain's Role Tomorrow (London: Hutchinson & Company, Ltd., 1967), pp. 104-105. 7

fast disappearing, with Aden being the prime example.⁶² That colony had been promised independence along with a complete British withdrawal by 1968. Why should British forces remain in the Persian Gulf?

His answer came the following day.

Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart argued that the "main object of policy in the Middle East should be the maintenance of stability . . . particularly with regard to the . . . small states in the Persian Gulf." Stewart added, "a number of other countries benefit from it [i.e. stability in the Gulf] and do not take part in the performance of the duty, but it benefits us to such an extent that it would be foolish for that or any other reason for us to throw the duty aside." He had answered Mr. Powell and reidentified the priorities for Labor's planners. Resources were tight. Growing political restiveness in the Gulf, in part aggravated by Radio Cairo and given added poignancy as British soldiers died in the streets of Aden, argued strongly with Mayhew and Powell for complete withdrawal. But the military presence

⁶²Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (Commons) 725, 5th Series, vol. 7 (1966): 1748.

"benefits us to such an extent . . ." In an eloquent synthesis of the Government's perception of their dilemma, Stewart ended his testimony by saying:

We are in the process, as it were, of moving from a previous century to a newer kind of world. Our task is to see both that the movement is carried out and that we do not restrict it by mere lack of vision, but also that we do not prevent it by running away and leaving a disturbed situation and a vacuum of power.⁶³

British policy-makers straddled the horns of that dilemma another year. The 1967 annual Defense Review noted that the "Political arrangements have been made and the practical preparations are underway . . ."⁶⁴ The Economist termed it "more a working out of decisions already taken than a statement of new ones."⁶⁵ Overseas defense expenditures had been cut by over 47 million pounds, but Defense Minister Healey, "in tribute to his persistence and ingenuity, kept his options /to maintain a major role east of Suez or to integrate with NATO in Europe/ open . . . until

⁶³Ibid., col. 1945-1960.

⁶⁴Great Britain, Ministry of Defense, The Defense Review, February 1967, Command 3203, p. 8.

⁶⁵The Economist, 18 February 1967, p. 589.

the future of British, and European, foreign policy takes a clearer shape."⁶⁶

The Labor Government Defense Policy Shift

Theoretically, the logic of this flexible approach was sound. British foreign policy outside Europe aimed "to foster developments which will enable the local peoples to live at peace without the presence of external forces."⁶⁷ This same lofty goal had explained their behavior in the past, but now assumed an undefined recognition of the inevitability of a Gulf withdrawal. As for Europe, Common Market parameters were also vague, and the Labor Government was exerting all its energies to hold the uncommitted positions. This is why the surprise White Paper of July 1967 so profoundly shocked the observers of British foreign policy. It seemed a tacit admission of inability to do what was so obviously "best." According to the Defense Ministry, the July announcement marked the end of a three-year review, "revising Britain's overseas policy, formulating the role of

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 590.

⁶⁷Command 3203, p. 7.

military power to support it, and planning the forces required to carry out this role."⁶⁸ It called for a total withdrawal from bases in Singapore and Malaysia by the mid 1970s, major reductions in the size and cost of the defense establishment, and "foreshadowed the end of Britain's military role in Asia east of Suez."⁶⁹

The 1967 Arab-Israeli June War may actually have precipitated this abrupt conclusion of that defense review. Not only had the sizeable British military presence in the general area been totally ineffective in preventing that conflict, but the economic effects of that war on Great Britain were already being recognized.⁷⁰ Informed speculation on

⁶⁸Great Britain, Ministry of Defense, Special Supplementary Statement, July 1967, Command 3357, p. 12.

⁶⁹Dana Schmidt, New York Times, 19 July 1967, p. 1.

⁷⁰Petroleum Press Service, XXXV (March 1968): 83. Due to the canal closure and various temporary oil embargoes, the additional strain on Britain's balance of payments reached \$200 million in the last half of 1967. See also Arabia: When Britain Goes (London: Fabian Society, 1967), p. 28, which lists the strong objections of the influential Socialist wing of the Labor Party of British forces remaining both east of Suez and particularly in the Persian Gulf.

the cause of the policy switch' ranged from acceptance of the Government's economic explanations, to an editorial in Le Monde which alleged that France's cross-channel neighbor had "continental" ambitions.⁷¹

Others cited more immediate circumstances. Neville Brown felt it was the severance of the Peking-Jakarta connection and the Indonesian 'confrontation' with Malaysia that forced the fundamental policy reassessment.⁷² Harold Hoskins claimed the United States forced the decision by advising their ally to close down, "since they no longer served any purpose" in the Far East.⁷³ But no one could deny that the slow rate of growth in the British economy, coupled with continued pressure against her balance of payments offered a tremendous incentive to rethink defense policy.

The Decision Postponed

Another aspect of the July 1967 Command Paper that stimulated speculation was the conspicuous

⁷¹Le Monde (Paris), 20 July 1967, p. 1. Under the editor's heading: "L'evolution vers l'Europe."

⁷²Brown, "British Arms . . .," p. 473.

⁷³Hoskins, "The Changing of the Guard . . .," p. 114.

absence of any reference to the Persian Gulf. Only two weeks before the far-reaching policy statement came out, the new Minister of Foreign Affairs, George Thompson, actually proposed military expansion in what he termed that "cockpit of territorial rivalries." He objected to any Gulf withdrawal, for it would leave behind "a dangerous vacuum which might well precipitate . . . a great power confrontation." Echoing the words of Defense Secretary Healey (see page 26), Thompson averred that "Her Majesty's Government's aim is to build up a stable regional balance of power between the countries of the area, but to do that takes time."⁷⁴ Still many stayed unconvinced of the continuing validity of the Gulf policy, given the departure of Britain's military from elsewhere east of Suez. For example, the London Times attacked the omission of Gulf force reductions in the 1967 report as evading the issue:

The recent events in the Middle East and Britain's inability to influence them, make it all the more urgent for Britain's military position in the Persian Gulf to be considered as searchingly as has been her position in the Far East.⁷⁵

⁷⁴Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates, (Commons), vol. 749 (1967): 2018.

⁷⁵Times (London), 19 July 1967, p. 1.

The Decision Announced

Despite a steady stream of denials to the contrary, including high level reassurances to wary Gulf shaikhs, the other shoe dropped in January 1968. The Gulf was included in the overall British withdrawal from east of Suez. Prime Minister Harold Wilson went before Commons, head bowed, and made the announcement to a stunned audience. No longer could Britain support the commitments so long defended as necessary for regional stability. He told his colleagues that "a detailed and searching review of policy by the Government in every major field of expenditure, with no exceptions, on the basis that no spending program could be sacrosanct,"⁷⁶ had been conducted. The Prime Minister noted that cutbacks were also made in Health and Welfare and Social Security, but there was still little doubt where the Labor Government's new priorities rested. As Wilson concluded,

When in the past this nation has set out to achieve the domestic objectives it has set itself, we have been frustrated by an endemic imbalance within the economy. If we refuse to abandon these objectives--and we do refuse--then the course we must take,

⁷⁶Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), vol. 756 (1968): 1579.

however great the temporary cut, is to remove the problem once and for all.⁷⁷

Mr. George Brown, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, identified the crux of the British predicament: "International power without economic strength is a hollow aim. We have taken the defense decision for the economic health of this country."⁷⁸ The February 1968 annual White Paper confirmed the Government's policy reversal. The British military in the Gulf would henceforth attempt to form "alternate arrangements for stability." This was a euphemism for a do-it-yourself defense program for the shaikhdoms. It aimed at integrating the existing British-officered Trucial Oman Scouts and local shaikhly guards into a regional defense force for the proposed Union of Arab Emirates. The Union was to federate the seven Trucial States, Qatar and Bahrain.⁷⁹ Defending the 1968 White Paper, Denis Healey contradicted his earlier statements and claimed that the July 1967 White Paper

⁷⁷Ibid., col. 1593.

⁷⁸Ibid., vol. 757 (1968): 730.

⁷⁹Great Britain, Ministry of Defense, Command 3927, p. 5, February 1968.

was the "real watershed in our post-war defense policy." This Gulf decision supposedly "is one of timing, not of principle . . ." ⁸⁰ Chancellor of the Exchequer, Roy Jenkins, was more candid in his assessment of the decision. In a BBC speech following Mr. Wilson's announcement, he admitted,

We are withdrawing more quickly from the Far East and the Persian Gulf, and making big consequential savings in defense expenditures. We are recognizing that we are no longer a superpower. ⁸¹

Surely other than financial consideration influenced the British planners. Healey confessed that there could even be some

cases in our imperial history /which/ might make the presence of our force an irritant rather than a stabilizing factor, particularly in the Middle East, where the events of 1956 still cast a long shadow. ⁸²

The increasingly untenable military and political commitments, perhaps legitimate before the Second World War, now faced "Asian, Arab and African

⁸⁰Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates, (Commons), vol. 760 (1968): 54.

⁸¹Excerpt reprinted in the New York Times, 17 January 1968, p. 14.

⁸²Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), vol. 757, (1968): 622.

nationalism . . . which it was neither wise nor possible for us to try to resist by force."⁸³ Yet these factors had been present and recognized for over twenty years, and do not adequately explain Labor's sudden change of heart on Britain's special position in the Gulf. Their country's sharply deteriorating economic situation was new. In November 1967, the balance of payment deficit hit the alarming level of 153 million pounds sterling. In partial reaction, Prime Minister Wilson had devalued the British currency from \$2.80 to \$2.40 (pound sterling exchange rate).⁸⁴ It is important to realize that the decision to withdraw from the Gulf was taken in this economic crisis atmosphere. As Phillip Darby put it:

. . . Just as the east of Suez role was largely a product of the existing defense system /standing after World War II/, ultimately the lack of resources rather than intellectual reflection ensured its /i.e. the east of Suez role/ rejection.⁸⁵

⁸³Ibid., col. 620.

⁸⁴The Economist, 11 December 1967, p. 1117. For an explanation of how the above mentioned impact of the 1967 June War contributed to this, see J. E. Hartshorn, "Oil and the Middle East War," World Today, 24 (April 1968): 154.

⁸⁵Darby, p. 334. Soviet view is presented by D. Volsky, "On the Persian Gulf," New Times 5 (1968): 14, and concurs with Darby's linkage of devaluation to

Reaction in Britain

Predictably, the Tory Party objected to Labor's solution to Britain's fiscal crisis. Long defenders of a strong defense position, they were appalled at the cumulative impact of the February 1966, July 1967 and January 1968 White Papers. They saw what the American editors of Business Week did when that magazine noted that

any future British military presense in the Indian Ocean /appeared/ to be foreclosed now, not only by Britain's decision to withdraw forces but also by the cancellation of its orders for fifty carriers.⁸⁶

The Conservative Opposition argued, often using statements uttered previously by Labor's own spokesmen, that stability required a British force in the Gulf. They cited the same ideals and lofty principles that had been used to justify the previous policy and disputed the Labor Government's claims of the financial savings anticipated with a drawdown of forces. Even the liberal British press rejected much of the Government's economic rationale, while agreeing with the

Gulf withdrawal.

⁸⁶"Who fills the vacuum waste of Suez?" Business Week, 2003 (20 January 1968), p. 31.

decision itself. As the New Statesman argued, the controversial announcement "will rapidly be accepted as inevitable and in due course as an act of statesmanship. (The fact that the Government took it for the wrong reasons is neither here nor there, and will soon be forgotten)." ⁸⁷

The Point of Departure

The ensuing pages consider the policy and the process of withdrawal. This review of the antecedents provides the base of departure. It has established that a relatively comfortable "special relationship" existed. The Gulf participants and their Foreign Office counterparts expected it to continue, perhaps modifying and developing certain aspects, but retaining the unique character of the Treaty System into the mid-1970s. As Phillip Darby wrote, unlike Britain's armed services, "the Foreign Office was content to operate on a basis of a model which emphasized the short run rather than the long run." ⁸⁸ The Labor Government's decision to withdraw, while economically

⁸⁷"The Curater Package," New Statesman (19 January 1968): 61.

⁸⁸British Defence Policy East of Suez 1947-1968, p. 140.

based, was really unrelated to specific conditions in the Gulf at the time of the announcement in January 1968. It was disquieting, disconcerting and demanding for both the Arabs and the British officials with whom they dealt. How Britain met the challenge of withdrawal, how she defined and defended her interests, will now be discussed.

CHAPTER TWO

BRITISH WITHDRAWAL FROM THE GULF WHILE

UNDER THE LABOR GOVERNMENT

(JANUARY 1968--JUNE 1970)

Initial Reaction to the Decision to Withdraw

Both in the British Foreign Office and in the Gulf, reaction to Prime Minister Wilson's (18 January 1968) announcement of withdrawal was one of surprised disbelief. One close observer held that the policy reversal, coming as it did within six weeks of Minister of State Goronwy Roberts' assurance to the contrary, "so shattered the British relationship in the Gulf that the next twelve months were spent recouping."¹ If in fact Anglo-Emirate relations were set back a year, that evaluation acquires added significance in view of the then British Ambassador to Kuwait's description of initial reaction within Her Majesty's Gulf diplomatic corps: "Nearly all of us were

¹R. M. Burrell, private interview held at the School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London), London, 25 October 1973.

thoroughly appalled at the prospect of getting out in four years."² Clearly, the British had set themselves a monumental task. They had to leave behind a viable political structure that would ensure "the one justifiable expectation for the British government--British oil interests will not be endangered."³

Sir Geoffrey Arthur, who accompanied Goronwy Roberts when the Emir of Kuwait was formally advised of the Labor Government's new Gulf policy, reports that Shaikh Sabah voiced his first concern about the decision's implications for Bahrain.⁴ Not coincidentally, Bahrain's ruler, Shaikh Isa bin Solman al-Khalifa, flew directly to Riyadh on learning of the announcement, to convey his fears of impending Iranian moves.⁵ Subsequent reports indicated that this meeting between Saudi Arabia's King Feisal and Shaikh

²Sir Geoffrey Arthur, Under-Secretary for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, private interview held at his office, Whitehall, London, England, 24 October 1973.

³"Countdown for a Federation," The Economist, (Special Survey of the Arabian Peninsula), 6 June 1970, p. 33.

⁴Sir Geoffrey Arthur, interview.

⁵Times (London), January 16, 1968, p. 4.

Isa evoked a Saudi pledge "to support the government of Bahrain"⁶ against all foreign threats, and sparked plans for a \$10 million project to construct a twelve-mile causeway, linking Bahrain Island to the Saudi mainland.⁷

Iranian response came swiftly, as the Shah abruptly canceled a long-scheduled visit to Feisal on only forty-eight hours notice.⁸ In Tehran, newsmen were privately informed that this Persian snub was related directly to the Bahrain-Saudi meeting.⁹ And so it was that the first effect of Prime Minister Wilson's announced intention to withdraw British forces was to polarize Arab and Iranian elements in the Gulf. Both sides recognized that the British treaty commitments, which guaranteed the shaikhdom's independence and promoted the necessary stability for British interests, would "be practically worthless without a military force to support them on the

⁶Christian Science Monitor, 6 March 1968. See also the New York Times, 18 January 1968.

⁷Times (London), 18 January 1968, p. 18.

⁸Times (London), 5 February 1968, p. 4.

⁹New York Times, 10 February, 1968.

spot.¹⁰ Accordingly, both Arabs and Persians sought to secure their own interests. The British did likewise, for though their Gulf policy had changed, peace and stability remained the paramount goal of Her Majesty's Government. The new circumstances dictated that resolution of the Bahrain claim take first priority if the January 1968 decision was to be executed effectively. Inter-Arab territorial disputes, tribal and shaikhly rivalries and the need to create local government organs to perform vital functions of state could only be faced after the potentially disastrous international confrontation over Bahrain was averted.¹¹

At first, Iran tried to keep Bahrain from becoming a focus for anti-Persian sentiment in the Arab world. The Iranian Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs asserted in March 1968 that Bahrain "is a question separate from /Iran's/ desire for cooperation

¹⁰Husain al-Baharna, The Legal Status of the Arabian Gulf States (London: Manchester University Press, 1968), p. 7.

¹¹Sir Geoffrey Arthur, interview. See also Robert Sullivan, "The Architecture of Western Security in the Persian Gulf," Orbis (Spring 1970): 79, for explanation of the inherent threat to oil interests and to world peace in such a regional bipolarity.

with the Gulf states."¹² But this ignored fundamental survival instincts of local Arab governments and the essence of Arab nationalism. Even the two most stable monarchical regimes, Riyadh and Kuwait, felt themselves threatened by Nasirite forces, and capitulation to the Persians in this case would have critically undermined their own governments. Tehran's avowed refusal even to negotiate the problem with the Arabs threatened to polarize the Gulf and preclude the maintenance of stable conditions that would guarantee the free flow of oil.¹³

The Federation of Arab Emirates Forms

The Bahrainis were desperate. Some important leaders on the island even advocated union with Kuwait, but this was not considered feasible by the rulers of either state, and so they extended their quest for support by actively promoting union with other Gulf shaikhdoms. Despite serious political,

¹²Christian Science Monitor, 16 March 1968.

¹³Times (London), 28 January 1968. The Iranian rationale is contained in a government source's quotation: "there will be nothing to discuss with another Gulf power about the future of one's own country."

social and economic differences, federation was considered an important means to mobilize Arab solidarity on the issue of territorial integrity and political sovereignty. On 27 February 1968, the Federation of Gulf Emirates was declared, linking the seven Trucial States, Bahrain and Qatar.¹⁴ This new union was welcomed by Cairo Radio as "the 15th Arab State," which would protect the Gulf from the "U.S.-backed Shah."¹⁵ This early effort to federate the shaikhdoms fell far short of these expectations, but it is important to note that the union of nine emirates began in reaction to the Persian irredentist policy.

To some British observers, it appeared that "Iran's determination to protect its 'rights and interest' in the Gulf 'with all its might' provided an unexpected bonus" for the Nasirists, and they blamed the Shah's "tactless impetuosity in dealing with the Persian Gulf issues" for the situation.¹⁶ In

¹⁴Karim Shakr, Second Secretary, Bahrain Permanent Mission to the United Nations, interview held in his office, New York, New York, 25 September 1973.

¹⁵Cairo Radio, 28 February 1968; Al-Ahram (Cairo), 29 February 1968, quoted in Mizan X(Mar./Apr., 1968): 50.

¹⁶"Persian Gulf: Intemperate Shah," The Economist (10 February 1968): 25.



contrast to his subordinates, the Shah's first public statement in reaction to the British withdrawal decision seemed remarkably understated. In it he warned the Arabs not to ignore Iranian interests, and to Whitehall he added, "We expect other countries to respond with more than mere smiles when we extend the hand of friendship."¹⁷ The newly formed federation was not mentioned by the Shah, but he could hardly have been unaware of its anti-Iranian bloodlines. In fact, he waited over a month before referring directly to the Federation of Arab Emirates (FAE). On the eve of Soviet Premier Kosygin's visit to Tehran in April, the Shah denounced the FAE as a British ploy to maintain "this historic inequity," that being a Bahrain beyond his government's administrative grasp.¹⁸ This anti-British propaganda tack had been introduced earlier by the Persian Premier, Hoveyda, who warned that "Britain's exit from one door should not result, for instance in America's entrance from the other door, or even Britain's re-entrance in some new form."¹⁹

¹⁷Times (London), 14 March 1968, p. 6.

¹⁸Times (London), 2 April 1968, p. 4.

¹⁹Christian Science Monitor, 6 March 1968. (Ahmad Torokeh). Actually, America's post-announcement

Predictably, Arab reaction to the FAE was favorable. The Saudi "formal blessing" to the union, implicitly backing an Arab Bahrain, came during a visit to Riyadh by Qatar's ruler on 3 April 1968. At that time, Feisal called for close economic, cultural and technical cooperation between the federated shaikhdoms and all Arab countries. Coinciding with that visit, Shaikh Isa of Bahrain had travelled to Baghdad for conferences with the Iraqi government, and there became an increasing tendency to view the Persian Gulf as an Iranian versus Arab arena.²⁰ Britain was already harvesting the early fruits of her precipitate decision, having clearly underestimated the divisive tendencies unleashed by her sudden announcement. A "dangerously unstable bipolar (Iran vs. Saudi Arabia) international subsystem had sprung up in the Persian Gulf." If left unchecked, it could have disastrous repercussions.²¹

role to this point had been confined to an ill-conceived call for an Arab, Persian, Turkish and Pakistani defense alliance for the Gulf which had been broadcast by Under Secretary of State Eugene Rostow on the Voice of America. It was promptly rejected by the States concerned. For details see the New York Times, 23 January 1968.

²⁰Times (London), 2 April 1968, p. 4.

²¹Robert R. Sullivan, "The Architecture of

Additional official statements of support and condemnation of the union were soon forthcoming from the Saudi and Persian capitals respectively. King Feisal was quoted in a New York Times article as saying,

There need be no power vacuum in that area when the British leave in 1971 as long as the federation receives the support of the United States and its neighbors. We certainly support it.²²

While from Tehran the Shah warned the Arab shaikhs against becoming the "inheritors of the British imperialist policy."²³ Yet it would seem that as the

Western Security in the Persian Gulf," Orbis (Spring, 1970): 72.

²²New York Times, 23 May 1968. Alvin J. Cottrell, "The United States and the Future of the Gulf after the Bahrain Agreement," New Middle East, 22 (July 1970): 19, reports longstanding Saudi disfavor toward "the creation of a new entity such as that proposed in the Federation on their border." It did exist to a limited extent, but never did King Feisal openly oppose the union. The Saudi position will be treated in further detail in Chapter 4, but throughout the withdrawal, the British were more concerned with Arab-Iranian disputes than the inter-Arab disagreements.

²³Times (London), 27 May 1968, p. 5. See also the excerpt from the influential Iranian press, Ettelaat, quoted in the Times (London), 30 May 1968, p. 8: "If the British imperialists think they can continue to keep their feet in the Gulf by manipulating some of their Arab stooges, they sure are wrong. Iran cannot tolerate political hypocrisy."

Iranian rhetoric intensified, their confidence waned in the policy of unyielding opposition to Bahraini inclusion in any Arab federation. In a succinct synopsis, The Economist portrayed the fallacy in the Iranian position:

The Iranian claim to Bahrain merely makes its ruler, Shaikh Isa, more anxious to become a part of a federated family. If Bahrain opted out it would be bound to seek independence and become one of the United Nations' smallest members. And where would the Shah be then? His present ploy is to play upon Arab susceptibilities by condemning the proposed federation as another colonialist (British imperialist) racket. But the Arab nationalist capitals, above all Cairo, have too many problems at home to rise to the bait at present. Later perhaps, but not now.²⁴

Resolution of the Bahrain Issue

It may have been that the Shah realized his initial policy was counter-productive, for in early June of 1968 he diverted his flight to the United States to stop briefly in Jidda. An officially "cordial" meeting ensued between the Gulf's two major monarchs, cooling political tempers and setting the stage for an extended visit by King Feisal to Tehran

²⁴"Persian Gulf: Nine in Step," The Economist (13 July 1968): 28.

later that year.²⁵ This long overdue recognition of the need for conciliation may have been in part precipitated by outside powers. In the two months prior to the June meeting, the Soviet Navy had conducted an unprecedented series of ship visits to ports in the Gulf, perhaps reminding both sides of their mutual vulnerability.²⁶ Yet another mitigating factor in the intensifying Saudi-Iranian competition was the incessant pressure of Radio Cairo, carrying its Nasirist threat against their overriding conservative, dynastic interests.²⁷

Whatever the immediate cause, this June meeting marks an important departure in resolving the Bahrain question. Polemical dispatches from Tehran gradually subsided, and an Iranian olive-branch was even extended to several Trucial State rulers, who officially called on the Shah that August.²⁸ Indications of accomodation were also forthcoming from London. First, the Times

²⁵Times (London), 4 June 1968, p. 5.

²⁶Times (London), 13 May 1968.

²⁷Sullivan, p. 74.

²⁸Times (London), 27 August 1968, p. 4.

(London) editorially criticized the Labor Government's failure to respect Iran's "legitimate" concerns for Gulf security, and called for active Foreign Office participation in mediating the Arab-Irani dispute.²⁹ Within two months Sir Geoffrey Arthur was recalled from Kuwait to Whitehall to serve as Assistant Under-Secretary for Middle East Affairs. It is now apparent that Sir Geoffrey functioned in the very role the Times had demanded, orchestrating an intricate complex of negotiations between the Iranians and Arabs of several Gulf states. Her Majesty's good offices were initially utilized in Kuwait, London, Tehran and Manama, and progress was achieved even though Iranians refused to deal directly with any Bahraini representatives. The talks moved to Geneva by the end of 1968. There, under United Nations auspices and the leadership of Dr. Ralph Bunche, what Sir Geoffrey described as, "along with Trieste, the only effective secret diplomacy since World War II," was concluded.³⁰

²⁹"The Dangerous Gulf," Times (London) 17 August 1968, p. 7.

³⁰This account was gleaned from interviews with Sir Geoffrey Arthur and Karim Shakr, and from an article by Lester Pearson, "Unforgettable Ralph Bunche," Readers Digest (March 1973): 93.

The public record gives an indication of the progress of the secret negotiations. King Feisal reached Tehran in November 1968. Accompanied by his highest advisors, the Arab King met with the Shah for six days of intense bargaining. News reports on these meetings tend to substantiate Sir Geoffrey Arthur's observation that any serious attempts to federate the shaikhdoms would necessarily await Saudi-Persian agreement on Bahrain (see above, p. 47). Considerable horse-trading went on over the heads of the shaikhs,³¹ but out of it cooperation replaced confrontation as the new theme for Gulf politics. Significantly, following the Tehran Conference, the Shah travelled to Kuwait for further consultations on how best to obtain regional stability.³² By December, British Defense Minister Denis Healey could say, "More progress has been made in the last nine months toward reaching a more viable political arrangement in the Gulf than has been made in the last twenty

³¹Times (London), 15 November 1968, p. 7. (Paul Martin), reports Iran dropped her "historic claim" to Bahrain and recognized the FAE in exchange for guarantees that Bahrain would be excluded from any Gulf federation.

³²Middle East Journal, Chronology.

years."³³ The most important public statement on Bahrain ever issued by the Shah came during a state visit to New Delhi in January, 1969. In it he unilaterally renounced the use of force in pursuit of the Persian claim, implying that a means should be devised for testing the popular will of the Bahraini people to determine where their allegiance should ultimately lie.³⁴ Three months later the method for such a sampling became obvious when Persia's Foreign Minister Zahedi climaxed his diplomatic rounds by announcing in London that ". . . whatever the solution [for the Bahrain question] it must go through the United Nations."³⁵ Shah Pavlavi publicly approved of the U.N. instrument the following week.³⁶ Finally Shaikh Isa recorded his acceptance of a U.N. supervised "ascertainment exercise" to measure his people's desires.³⁷

³³Quoted in the Times (London), 19 December 1968, p. 8.

³⁴Middle East Economic Digest, 10 January 1969, XIII-2. Also see R. M. Burrell, The Persian Gulf (New York: Library Press, 1972), pp. 41-42.

³⁵Times (London), 28 May 1969, p. 6.

³⁶Times (London), 10 June 1969, p. 11.

³⁷Times (London), 18 September 1969, p. 6. The term "ascertainment exercise" was used to denote a

Bahrain's reluctance to submit to a plebescite belied the government's insecure political base. The al-Khalifa family autocratically governed a relatively sophisticated population, and their rule was predicated on their absolute authority in all matters. Allowing a United Nations commission to measure their subjects' opinions involved a voluntary surrender of authority, and potentially unleashed the dissident political forces on the island. Whether an act of desperation or of political self-confidence, the decision to permit an extra-national institution to decide the future of Bahrain was reached very deliberately by Shaikh Isa.³⁸

The Shah also had to contend with tenacious opposition to surrendering what generations of Iranians had been taught was Persian soil. The political

U.N.-supervised opinion sounding. It did not comprise a ballot procedure, but instead relied on a crude polling technique which produced nevertheless a valid sampling of the popular will. Mr. Anthony Reeve, British diplomat, interview held at United Kingdom Embassy, Washington, 1 December 1973.

³⁸Karim Shakr, interview, 25 September 1973, maintains the decision was a demonstration of self-confidence taken by a government certain of its popularity. Canadian Prime Minister Pearson, in his memorial to Ralph Bunche, "Unforgettable," p. 93, relates an anecdote that sheds a somewhat different light on the subject. He describes how the fatally ill and almost blind Dr. Bunche flew to Geneva and personally reassured the Bahrainis, who began to back out of a

liability was enhanced by the fact that the censure emanated from the right-wing, conservative elements of Iranian society, which comprise the power-base of the monarchy. His predicament was evident when he said, "We have renounced the use of force, nevertheless this is a question of prestige and it must be solved."³⁹

Apparently the Shah and the Shaikh discovered a way to meet their problem, for the secret negotiations at Geneva ended with the public appointment of Vittorio Winspeare Guicciardi, Director General of the United Nations Geneva Office, to administer the Bahrain opinion poll.⁴⁰ The "ascertainment exercise" was held in April and the anticipated results announced on 2 May 1970. The Bahrainis had opted "overwhelmingly

settlement during the final stage of the secret negotiations.

³⁹Quoted in the Times (London), 10 June 1969, p. 11. While both Sir William Luce and Sir Geoffrey Arthur emphasized the Shah's substantial sacrifice on the Bahrain issue, the Times Diplomatic Correspondent suggested that the problem was not "a matter of as much concern to the (Iranian) general public as the (Iranian) government likes to tell foreign correspondents . . .," 15 March 1968, p. 7.

⁴⁰

U.N. Monthly Chronicle 7 (April 1970):

56-57.

to attain full independence and sovereignty" and that "Bahrain should be an Arab state."⁴¹ Iran's Permanent Representative to the U.N., Mehdi Vakil, immediately accepted the outcome, noting that the "long-standing dispute had come to an end." The United Kingdom's Permanent U.N. Representative, Lord Caradon, effusively attributed the successful conclusion to the irresistible combination of "British restraint, Iranian magnanimity, United Nations impartiality, Italian fairness of judgment and Arab dignity and self-respect."⁴² Others have alleged that more tangible factors were at work, specifically contained in a secret corollary to the Iranian agreement that decided the remaining Arab-Irani territorial conflict over the Abu Musa and Tumbs islands in Tehran's favor.⁴³ This is strongly denied, however, by British Foreign Office sources and by Sir William Luce. The general impression they give

⁴¹U.N. Monthly Chronicle 7 (May 1970): 3.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 4-6.

⁴³Joseph J. Malone, The Arab Lands of Western Asia (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973), p. 239, and Michael Burrell, interview, October 1973, both imply an Anglo-Iranian understanding on Persian control of these islands had been reached.

is that all concerned recognized the need to settle Bahrain before getting on with the withdrawal of British forces from the Gulf. The only compromise reached on the islands issue was an agreement to disagree. Subsequent events certainly indicate that, secret corollary or none, the Abu Musa and Tumbs controversy remained unsettled up to the last hours of Britain's formal presence in the Persian Gulf.⁴⁴

British Policy Toward the Federation

Resolution of the Bahrain conflict was an essential prerequisite for forming a viable political structure on the Arab side. Bahrain, as the most populous and politically advanced shaikhdom, could hardly be expected to participate in any meaningful regional planning before her own future status was resolved. Nor would the smaller states be free to act.

⁴⁴Sir Geoffrey Arthur, interview, claimed that the primary reasons for Sir William Luce's appointment as Special Representative of the Foreign Secretary was to resolve the islands issue. Sir William, while not completely agreeing with the priority, did indicate the islands issue occupied most of his energies. Interview held at the Bath Club, London 24 October 1973. Both were substantiated by Mr. Anthony Reeve, who served as Trucial States Desk Officer for the Foreign Office from January 1970 until the withdrawal was completed. Interview held at the British Embassy to the United States, Washington, 1 October 1973.

As was shown above, the genesis of the original union was reactionary, a kind of fall-back position the shaikhs turned to after their initial stunned (not to say pathetic) attempt to oppose withdrawal.⁴⁵ Abu Dhabi's Shaikh Zayd, on behalf of the Trucial rulers, had proposed to underwrite the expense of maintaining some British forces in the Gulf. The shaikhs had hoped that this might alleviate the cause for the decision, and £25 million was reportedly offered.⁴⁶ After a rude rebuff by the British,⁴⁷ Shaikhs Zayd and Rashid (the rulers of Abu Dhabi and Dubai) looked inward, if not in desperation, at least in the absence of any alternative. They proclaimed their intention to

⁴⁵Patrick Bannerman, Foreign Office Research Department Middle East Desk Officer, interview held in his office at Whitehall, London, England, 25 October 1973, pointed out that the rulers were "schizophrenic about the withdrawal, wanting to reverse the decision yet seeing the impossibility of doing so."

⁴⁶Times (London), 22 January 1968, p. 4.

⁴⁷Times (London), 20 February 1968, p. 4. Also see Malone, The Arab Lands, p. 237. Karim Shakr stated that the funds were to be provided by Abu Dhabi and Dubai. Sir William Luce was one of many British leaders critical of this perfunctory handling. He wrote: "After all, other people pay for our forces . . . It should have been given very careful consideration," see, "Britain's Withdrawal from the Middle East and Persian Gulf," Journal of the Royal United Services Institute 114 (March 1969): 9.

jointly administer foreign policy, defense and internal security, and to invite the other five Trucial States to do the same. Bahrain and Qatar were initially considered too far advanced for inclusion, but when Bahrain objected to the implied isolation (citing fears of Iranian occupation), she aligned herself with the budding federation. Qatar quickly followed suit.⁴⁸ In a highly uncharacteristic display of unanimity and alacrity, the nine rulers met at Abu Dhabi, 26 February 1968. Qatar proposed a federal executive Council of Rulers, to be supplemented by consultative councils of defense, economic and cultural affairs.⁴⁹ The meeting adjourned to the euphoric accolades of the Arab press (see above, p. 47). Even the sceptical British press enthusiastically reported that the "old rivalries seemed to have been buried in a common desire for a united front."⁵⁰

⁴⁸Times (London), 20 February 1968, p. 4, for early moves. For text of the original Abu Dhabi-Dubai agreement see Orient (Hamburg), April 1968, p. 67. Additional legal background on the early stages of the union contained in Husain M. al-Baharna, Legal Status of the Arabian Gulf States (London: Manchester University Press, 1968), pp. 328-331.

⁴⁹Times (London), 27 February 1968, p. 5.

⁵⁰Times (London), 28 February 1968, p. 5. Also see, "Persian Gulf: Desert Merger," Time, 1 March

The British played no role in the creation of the union apart from the negative effect of Defense Minister Healey's rejection of Shaikh Zayd's offer. The Foreign Office "warmly welcomed"⁵¹ and smiled paternally on what was a genuine Arab initiative.⁵² On the other hand, they deliberately maintained a low profile in support of the union to spare the shaikhs the stigma among the Arab Nationalists of too close an identification with the British.⁵³ The shaikhs independently reinforced this effect by inviting no British officials to the conference.⁵⁴ It has been perennial British policy to encourage both eventual self-sufficiency and some sort of union, but most realistic observers agreed that few concrete accomplishments had been generated. The phlegmatic effort to develop the shaikhdoms before 1968 did not derive from an deliberate British attempt to prolong

1968, p. 25, for an optimistic review of these events.

⁵¹Times (London), 20 February 1968, p. 4.

⁵²Karim Shakr, interview. Aloy Sir Geoffrey Arthur, interview.

⁵³Patrick Bannerman, interview.

⁵⁴Times (London), 28 February 1968.

the dependency status. Nor was it the practical effect of a British plot to divide and rule.⁵⁵ Instead, it stemmed from complacency born of mutual satisfaction. Both the British and the Arab rulers, enjoyed their unique, symbiotic relationship and neither really wanted it to end. The lack of progress was belatedly admitted by Labor Party spokesman, Mr. Denis Healey, before the House of Commons, when he declared in March 1970:

. . . all progress which has been made in the Gulf in the past twenty years towards cooperation among the local states, notably between Iran and Saudi Arabia, on the future of Bahrain and the movement towards a union in the lower Gulf, started only after Her Majesty's Government announced three years in advance that they planned to leave the Gulf.⁵⁶

The 1968 announcement changed what had been an academic exercise with no real program for implementation into a practical necessity. Few could quarrel with the need for a more positive declaration of intent

⁵⁵As suggested by Leonard Mosely, Power Play: The Story of Oil in the Middle East (New York: Random House, 1973), p. 360.

⁵⁶Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th series, vol. 812 (1 March 1971): 1231. This writer inferred from the interview with Mr. Bannerman that Mr. Healey's opinion was substantially correct.

to withdraw than had been previously stated. Objections were raised, however, regarding the timing of this announcement, against both its self-imposed 1971 deadline and because it caught local rulers and their British advisors by surprise.⁵⁷ These factors forced what would have been "realistic policy objectives within ten years to become realistic policy objectives in three or four years,"⁵⁸ and undermined the shaikhs' confidence in the British military and civilian officials assigned as their advisors. Complicating matters further, the rulers' dismay quickly turned to disbelief when the opposition leader, Edward Heath, declared his Conservative Party's intention to "ignore the time phasing laid down by the Prime Minister and his government for the Far East and the Middle East."⁵⁹ The natural predilection to believe that what one wants to happen will occur was augmented

⁵⁷See Luce, "Britain's Withdrawal from the Middle East and the Persian Gulf," p. 7. Also see Michael Burrell's observation, p.44 above.

⁵⁸Mr. Anthony Reeve, interview. At the time of the announcement Mr. Reeve was serving as the Assistant Political Agent in Qatar.

⁵⁹Great Britain, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th series, vol. 756 (18 January 1968): 756.

by the unusually close ties that linked several shaikhs to the Conservative Party.⁶⁰

Divisions Within the Federation

The British combination of poor preparation, an ill-timed announcement, and a serious credibility gap exacerbated the inherent divisions, parochialism and inexperience of the Arabs. Despite the impression of solidarity expressed in the news reports cited above, the initial meeting of the rulers had exposed many of the inter-shaikhly rivalries. Bahrain was especially castigated, particularly by those who feared Iranian retribution for their political involvement with the al-Khalifa family. From the Bahraini perspective, this attitude spawned a continuing push to exclude them from the federation. It was expressed in the interminable debates on the capital location, and over constitutional bases for governing the union.⁶¹ Yet there is good reason to believe these were more than ersatz issues, for Bahrain's practical differences

⁶⁰Michael Burrell, interview. The effect of this Tory position on the development of the federation will be treated in detail below.

⁶¹Karim Shakr, interview.

with her sister shaikhdoms reflected more fundamental distinctions of both substance and style. She possessed nearly half of the nine shaikhdoms' half million population. Bahrain was the only Gulf state where the indigenous Arabs were not tribally oriented and organized, and in which the rudiments of modern political and economic systems existed.⁶² Thus the opposition to Bahrain emanated from more than fear of Iran. It did not go unnoticed by the less populous and socially retarded Trucial States that adoption of Bahrain's proposals for a closely-knit federation, a proportionally-based legislative assembly, strong central government headquartered on Bahrain, and broad governmental participation in the economic and social spheres, portended Bahrain's eventual domination of the federation. Bahrain's reputation as a hotbed of radicalism, her poor economic prospects following British withdrawal, and her "arrogant and patronizing approach to her Gulf neighbors virtually assured concerted opposition to any Bahraini initiatives.⁶³

⁶²Aramco Background Information: The Nine Emirates (Dhahran: Aramco, 1970), pp. 1-3. Also see The Middle East and North Africa: 1968-1969, 16th ed. (London: Europa Publications Ltd., 1969), p. 555.

⁶³"Countdown for a Federation," The

On the other hand, the Bahrainis' commitment to a union itself was suspect. As indicated above, her initial move toward federation had been in response to the Iranian threat. Subsequent compromises during the debates with her sister shaikhdoms were accepted by the Bahrainis in an effort to maintain the illusion of Arab solidarity for the edification of the Shah. As the secret negotiations dragged on in Geneva, the Bahrainis' position on the constitutional bases of the union was eroded. By the October 1969 meeting of the nine rulers, she was informally committed to accepting relatively minor ministerial portfolios and the loose federal form advocated by her opponents, chiefly Qatar and Dubai. Had not Ras al Khaima's Shaikh Saqr stormed out of that forum, disrupting it before the signatures had actually been appended to the compromise agreement, Bahrain might have been formally bound to abide by it.⁶⁴

Economist (Special Survey of the Arabian Peninsula), 6 June 1970, p. 33. The Bahraini proposals were delineated by Karim Shakr, interview.

⁶⁴Contrary to John Duke Anthony's article "The Union of Arab Amirates," Middle East Journal (Summer 1972): 284, it was this 1969 meeting and not the Oct. 1970 meeting that collapsed over a Constitutional dispute between Bahrain and Qatar. See The Economist, 237 (31 October 1970): 30. At that 1970 meeting the Qataris accused the Bahrainis of breaking their word and, from the facts described above, the accusation

Instead, the Iranian claim to Bahrain was renounced and an unfettered Bahraini delegation reopened federation negotiations, free to renege on the concessions that had been extracted but never formalized.⁶⁵

This fortuitous coincidence of Bahraini needs and Ras al-Khaima's actions raised many an eyebrow. Sir Geoffrey Arthur called it "a put up job."⁶⁶ Ostensibly, Shaikh Saqr was spontaneously revulsed by "the sudden intrusion" of British Political Agent, James Treadwell, into the Abu Dhabi meeting. In fact, Treadwell had been scheduled to read an official letter from the Political Resident, which rather innocuously encouraged the rulers to resolve their differences expeditiously in the interests of forming a more perfect union.⁶⁷ Shaikh Saqr, one of the wildest of the Gulf rulers, was not one to be offended by such a bland admonishment. Joseph Malone

may have some merit.

⁶⁵Karim Shakr, interview.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Times (London), 27 October 1969, p. 6, contains excerpts of the letter as released by the Foreign Office the preceeding day.

perceptibly analyzes the incident: "Observers variously saw Saudi, Iraqi and Iranian influence behind the old shaikh's actions, but connoisseurs of Gulf politics asserted that he was in the pay of all three countries."⁶⁸

The Willoughby Defense Review

The machinations manifested in the October 1969 meeting had characterized inter-shaikhly relations for hundreds of years. As noted in Chapter One, the Shaikhdoms had been created, largely out of long-standing internal feuds.⁶⁹ The leaders had been conditioned for generations to intrigue, to hate, to distrust one another. It is not surprising, therefore, that one of the few positive accomplishments of the young federation had actually been contracted for, and was the product of foreign labors. At the October 1968 meeting, the nine rulers laid the "theoretical

⁶⁸Malone, Arab Lands, p. 238. And the list of suspects with a motive and the means to sabotage the meeting grows the more one studies the problem. At a minimum Qatar and Bahrain could well have had a hand in Saqr's pocket.

⁶⁹See John Duke Anthony, "The Union of Arab Emirates," Middle East Journal 26 (Summer 1970): 271-287, wherein pertinent rivalries are elaborated.

foundations" for establishing a joint military force to replace the 6,000 British troops assigned to the Gulf.

As with other federation matters, this military issue divided the shaikhs between those desiring a close union and those preferring the loose federation. And, as with most controversial matters, their initial response was to establish a committee to study and report back with the findings. However, they soon realized that the dearth of indigenous military expertise required the rulers commission a foreign military expert to make recommendations on creating a defense system.⁷⁰ The individual was chosen by the rulers shortly after the October 1968 meeting adjourned. To no one's surprise, he turned out to be British Army officer, Major-General Sir John Willoughby. Significantly, this officer had been Commander of the British army in the Middle East, and had engineered the difficult withdrawal of forces from Aden.

From Whitehall's standpoint, British policy toward future local defense arrangements had already been elucidated in the Supplementary Statement on

⁷⁰Times (London), 22 October 1968, p. 6. See also Middle East Journal, Chronology.

Defense Policy issued in July 1968:

In parallel with the withdrawal of our forces, we wish to see a steady evolution in the local arrangements for defense and cooperation . . . discussions about the disposal of our installations will be opened with the Persian Gulf States.⁷¹

Again the shaikhdoms' and Her Majesty's policies dovetailed neatly, bespeaking a greater coordination than either side will admit.

The Willoughby Report was completed in the Spring of 1969. It recommended the incorporation of the Trucial Oman Scouts, their associated facilities and equipment, and the individual state defense forces into one union Defense Force.⁷² Arabization of that army was to be a part of the program, as had been recommended by the liberal wing of the Labor Party two years earlier.⁷³ Most British military advisors expected this to be a slow process, due to the continuing requirement for outside technical

⁷¹Great Britain, Ministry of Defense, Command Paper 3701, p. 5.

⁷²Times (London), 8 April 1969, p. 9. (A. M. Rendel).

⁷³"Arabia When Britain Goes," Fabian Society Research Series, 259 (London, Fabian Society), April 1967, p. 23.

support for "some years" after 1971.⁷⁴ Willoughby proceeded to recommend a force composition that would double the number of Trucial Oman Scouts and include British-made high performance jet aircraft, helicopters, patrol craft and air-defense missile systems, with seconded and contract British officers integrated into the command structure.⁷⁵ His input reflected a heavy emphasis on suppressing potential internal subversive movements, as opposed to withstanding any specific external threat.

It is particularly instructive to read an article by Major-General Willoughby published only a few months before he was contracted for this study. In it he alluded to the "high potential for insurgency" in the Persian Gulf, and suggested techniques to counter such a threat, based primarily on his experience in Aden.⁷⁶ When the rulers accepted his

⁷⁴Times (London), 8 April 1969, p. 9 (A. M. Rendel).

⁷⁵"Going, going . . .," The Economist (Special Survey on the Arabian Peninsula) 235 (6 June 1970): 35. Also see Henry Stanhope, "Growing Naval Activity is Expected," Times (London) (Special Report: Britain and the Gulf): V.

⁷⁶"Problems of Counter Insurgency in the Middle East," Journal of the Royal United Services Institute 63 (May 1968): 108.

report in July 1969, the internal subversion threat, "instigated possibly by one or more foreign powers with the aim of installing a puppet or revolutionary government" was re-emphasized by Willoughby.⁷⁷ He also maintained that the Union's defenses should be capable of withstanding a foreign invasion long enough to mobilize world opinion in the United Nations and to bring in allies. The reports implied strongly that private armies, such as the burgeoning Abu Dhabi Defense Force, should be allocated to the Union. Command would be delegated to a seconded British officer to avoid placing all military resources under any one shaikh.⁷⁸ It had been generally recognized that the real strength of the 1,600 man Trucial Oman Scouts had rested on just such independence.⁷⁹

Though the Willoughby Report contained virtually no surprises and received verbal support from nearly

⁷⁷See Times (London), military correspondent, A. M. Rendel, report of July 21, 1969, p. 4, for details of composition and missions.

⁷⁸Times (London), 30 July 1969, p. 4, (Rendel). An indication of the Dubai reaction to all of this came from Mehdi al-Tajer, director of the Ruler's office, who openly expressed his fervent wish that Britain remain past 1971.

⁷⁹The Economist, (Special Survey of the Arabian Peninsula) 235 (6 June 1970): 34.

all quarters, its fundamental call for uniting the varied defense organizations in the Gulf was ignored. Shaikh Zayd continued to develop his Abu Dhabi Defense Force (ADDF). In 1969 the noted correspondent Nicholas Herbert wrote, "I have heard talk in Abu Dhabi of the ADDF's ability to handle the Saudi's in a border war."⁸⁰ By 1970, the force reached the level of Brigade strength (that is two infantry regiments, an armored car regiment and an artillery squadron, a squadron (12) of Hunters, and a 12 patrol-boat Navy). Qatar's Security Force was only slightly smaller. The Bahrain Defense Force, begun in 1969, was also growing independently, and even Ras al-Khaima created her own 300 man "mobile force" in 1969.⁸¹ The traditional predilection for self-sufficiency was again undermining a successful transition of power. As late as February 1970, official British policy had not gone much beyond the limited goal of the 1968 statement (see above, p. 73). The annual Statement of Defense Estimates could only note that "emphasis has again been placed on advising and assisting local forces in the preparation

⁸⁰Times (London), 6 October 1969, p. 13.

⁸¹Times (London), (Special Report: Britain and the Gulf), 16 December 1970, p. IV.

for our departure from the Gulf by the end of 1971."⁸²]

Composition of the Federation

Explanations abound for this lack-luster performance by British advisors and the Arab shaikhs. The Gulf tradition of mutual suspicion had been aggravated by extreme social and economic disparities. The distinctions were alluded to above, when Bahrain's inclusion in the union was discussed. As was apparent, the composition of the union, not of its component institutions, was the fundamental issue. Was Bahrain, and to a lesser degree was Qatar, so far advanced as to make their systems incompatible with the seven trucional shaikhdoms?

The Fabian Society, the highly influential socialist arm of the Labor Party, had gone on record in 1967, opposing a union of nine: "Any project of close association or amalgamation into a federation in the foreseeable future is unrealistic," because of the social development and the gross population imbalances.⁸³ Several knowledgeable sources insist that

⁸² Great Britain, Ministry of Defense, Command 270, p. 5.

⁸³ "Arabia: When Britain Goes," p. 17.]

Great Britain had pushed for a union of nine.⁸⁴

Correspondent Michael Wall sardonically observed that

the British recipe for stability is the creation of a federation of the nine Gulf amirates . . . /this/ looks as sensible on Whitehall desks as did the federations proposed for South Arabia, the Caribbean, Malaysia and Nigeria.⁸⁵

But British officials deny this to a man. Sir Geoffrey Arthur asserts that "everyone knew it would be seven,"⁸⁶ and the Foreign Office Research Department reportedly warned at the time that Qatari and Bahraini participation "unnecessarily exacerbated centrifugal forces" that sprang from the internal rivalries within the seven Trucial States.⁸⁷ In May 1969, Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart provided an indication that these opinions were based on more than perfect hindsight, by reaffirming his government's preference for a "mini-federation /i.e., without Bahrain/ to none at

⁸⁴Malone, Arab Lands, p. 238. Also see The Economist, (Special Survey of the Arabian Peninsula), 6 June 1970, p. 33.

⁸⁵Quoted from an article by Nevill Brown, "Britain and the Gulf--Don't Go Just Yet Please! The Wisdom of Withdrawal Reconsidered," New Middle East 24 (September 1970): 44.

⁸⁶Sir Geoffrey Arthur, interview.

⁸⁷Patrick Bannerman, interview.

all."⁸⁸

Encouragement for the larger grouping was emanating from a powerful outside source, however, that being King Feisal in Saudi Arabia. He hoped to dilute the power and prestige of his old Buraimi rival, Shaikh Zayd of Abu Dhabi, by adding the virtual Saudi clients in Doha and Manama to the federation. He also reasoned that a union of nine would be less inclined to take instructions from Tehran.⁸⁹ Ironically, the Foreign Office concluded that Feisal considered the seven-state grouping to be a British ploy, upgrading Shaikh Zayd's relative power in the Gulf,⁹⁰ in a post-withdrawal version of the old divide and rule devise.

The myriad of internal and external conflicting interests, maneuvering within the Byzantine atmosphere of Gulf politics, had a debilitating effect during the two and one-half years that preceded the ousting of

⁸⁸Times (London), 30 May 1969, p. 6.

⁸⁹Patrick Bannerman, interview. Sir William Luce confirmed this impression of the Saudi role, noting that as late as April 1971, he personally tried and failed to convince King Feisal that a union of nine was not feasible.

⁹⁰Sir Geoffrey Arthur, interview.

Britain's Labor Government in June 1970. The ceaseless constitutional bickering over political representation, capital location,⁹¹ and diplomatic corps and defense force composition, simply manifested the larger, the substantive differences. The rulers refused to face these issues, consistently establishing committees and sub-committees to review the reports of still other committees and sub-committees. Statements were released and non-decisions announced, while a veritable bureaucracy of study groups grew up in lock-step accordance with the rules of parliamentary procedure. Perhaps all this provided a necessary educational and experiential transition, since particularly the Trucial State rulers had evolved in a highly traditional society, made even more anachronistic by the insulating British presence. Where there had been moderate social and economic development under British tutelage, the Arab rulers' resistance to political advancement had been almost total.⁹² Considering this reinforced parochialism, one can sympathize with the shaikhs, who,

⁹¹Sir William Luce considered the capital location issue "a nonsense", interview.

⁹²"Arabia: When Britain Goes," Fabian Society Research Series 259 (London, Fabian Society), April 1967, p. 19.

with the British withdrawal, faced a complete reorganization of their power system.⁹³ The Economist described the situation:

Since the February, 1968 formation of the federation, traditional family feuds, tribal dissent, greed for money and power and, above all, the slow realization of what federation really meant have blocked every attempt to move forward beyond mere agreement to the idea.⁹⁴

The Conservative Party's Position

Yet much of the blame must be shared by the British. Sir Alec Douglas-Home condemned the January 1968 announcement of the decision to withdraw for bringing "to the surface tensions which had hitherto lain dormant."⁹⁵ But the Conservatives contributed to the negative impact by announcing their intention to reverse the decision (see above, p. 66). Following an April 1969 visit to the Gulf, Mr. Heath insisted that his talks with "seven major rulers, a large number of

⁹³Patrick Bannerman, interview. Also see The Economist (Special Survey of the Arabian Peninsula), pp. 33-34, for extended discussion on this aspect of the transition.

⁹⁴"Countdown," The Economist, p. 33.

⁹⁵Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th series, vol. 812 (1971): 1227.

merchants and people in the Emirates, as well as people in Iran, Saudi Arabia and Egypt" left him certain that the British presence should remain after 1971.⁹⁶ However, the Shah of Iran refuted Mr. Heath's contention:

We have never regarded the British presence in the Gulf as for us. It has always been against. Your Government has always favored the Arabs at our expense. It was your Government's decision to go and we shall not invite you back--I made this clear to Mr. Heath when he was here"⁹⁷

Predictably, the British Labor Government also disclaimed support for Mr. Heath's view. Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart sensibly acknowledged the impossibility of reversing the withdrawal decision ". . . because the world has changed and so has the British role east of Suez."⁹⁸ The former Political Resident in the Gulf, Sir William Luce, whose views were highly regarded by British policy makers, agreed that, while disapproving of the timing and method of the decision, it had "set in motion certain processes

⁹⁶Times (London), 10 April 1969, p. 5. The following day the Times, p. 8, reported Mr. Heath declared that Conservative Party policy was to remain after 1971.

⁹⁷Times (London), 10 June 1969, p. 11. (Winston Churchill).

⁹⁸Times (London), 30 May 1969, p. 6.

which cannot be put back."⁹⁹ The Times diplomatic correspondent, after a two week survey of opinion in the area, reported "unanimity among [British] diplomats and the military" that the Tory-advocated policy reversal "would make the eventual withdrawal, and the achievement of stable conditions after it, all the harder."¹⁰⁰ The reasoning was obvious, "so long as the British are there, and hint that in certain circumstances they may be prepared to stay, the rulers have no incentive to push on with the federation."¹⁰¹

⁹⁹Sir William Luce, "Britain's Withdrawal from the Middle East and Persian Gulf," Journal of the Royal United Services Institute 114 (March 1969): 6-8. This in itself was a reversal of the personal position taken in an article by Sir William Luce in 1967, when he called for a gradual withdrawal based on the Kuwait model, wherein military protection was guaranteed even after the direct political connection had been severed. See "Britain and the Persian Gulf," Round Table 227 (July 1967): 277-283.

¹⁰⁰Times (London), 8 April 1969, p. 9. (A. M. Rendel).

¹⁰¹The Economist 237 (31 October 1970): 33.

CHAPTER THREE

EXECUTION OF WITHDRAWAL UNDER

THE CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT

(JUNE 1970-DECEMBER 1971)

The Government Changes

Both the Labor Government's announcement of the withdrawal plan in January 1968 and the Conservative Party's opposition to the policy were based on domestic and international political considerations that only indirectly related to the conditions in the Gulf. As discussed in Chapter II, the Labor Government's decision was taken because, within the Party ranks, domestic affairs outweighed foreign affairs when allocating their limited resources. So too did the Conservative Party position embody the views of a significant British political constituency. This group believed that, "the legacy of empires survives . . . in the unwritten moral and sentimental duty felt by many in Britain" to previous imperial clients and in "the numerous explicit British treaty commitments to SEATO, to CENTO, to the countries of the Persian Gulf,

and to Malaysia and with Singapore."¹

Appealing to this mentality, Mr. Heath and his party hammered away on their anti-withdrawal theme. Shadow Foreign Secretary, Alec Douglas-Home, endorsed a right-wing party pamphlet that "mobilized the facts which are consistent with a Soviet intention to outflank Europe by naval action . . ." The pamphlet asserted that "the Labour Government's decision to withdraw from the Gulf is an open invitation to fill the vacuum left by Britain's departure."² In November he wrote the foreword for another Conservative pamphlet that called for maintaining a military presence in the Gulf, where "the governments consider our presence to be of paramount importance for the future stability of the area."³ The influential Economist editorially

¹L. W. Marlin, "British Defense Policy: the Long Recessional," Adelphi Papers 61 (November 1969): 5.

²Red Fleet Off Suez (London: Conservative Political Centre, January 1969), forward and p. 10. Sir Alec, a Conservative Party spokesman on foreign affairs, had consistently called for maintaining a military British presence in the Gulf because "a presence denies an opening for a possible enemy looking to stir the pot of trouble." As quoted in the Times (London), 25 August 1969, p. 4.

³A Presence East of Suez (London: Conservative Political Centre, November 1969), see forward and p. 14. Sir Alex applauded this illustration of "the

backed this line, noting that, though a working federation of Arab states could have been achieved had it "been pursued vigorously before the oil wealth . . . not only has it come too late but the attempt is being made to push it through too fast."⁴ Opposition leader Edward Heath succinctly conveyed the Tory position in an article in Foreign Affairs:

It is more and more recognized that the economies promised as a result of the policy of withdrawal are false in the sense that they expose British interests and the future of our friends to an unacceptable risk.⁵

When elections were called in early 1970, repudiation of Labor's Gulf policy became a key plank in the Tory Party platform. Political pundits felt this contributed to the surprising June 1970 victory by Mr. Heath.⁶

extent of British economic interest in the areas of the Persian Gulf . . . and to the absolute need" for Britain to maintain access to the oil.

⁴"Countdown for a Federation," The Economist (Special Survey of the Arabian Peninsula) 235 (6 June 1970): 33.

⁵"Realism in British Foreign Policy," Foreign Affairs 48 (October 1, 1969): 50.

⁶Times (London), 23 June 1971, p. 1.

Not only had the Conservative platform pleased their electorate, it reportedly cheered their American allies. President Nixon's fragile, "jerry-built" contingency plans for a Vietnam-burdened U.S. response to the proposed pull-out could now be set aside.⁷ Secretary of State Rogers, "one of those white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant Americans who believe that Britain still has a worldwide role . . .," pressured for quick, official implementation of Heath's campaign promise to remain in the Gulf.⁸

Sir Alec Up the Gulf

Perhaps in partial response, in one of the new Government's first moves, Foreign Secretary Sir Alec Douglas-Home was dispatched to the Gulf in a 'fact-finding' mission. Sir Alec was to assess the possibility of halting the withdrawal, and he contacted each of the Gulf shaikhs to determine their views. Opinions of the major regional powers were also to be solicited. The Economist applauded the action:

It is right that the British government is taking a long, cool look at the situation in the Persian Gulf before it decides

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., 27 June 1970, p. 1.

whether or not to keep a military presence there.⁹

But the facts Sir Alec found were somewhat at odds with the pre-election rhetoric. Naturally, the rulers of Bahrain, Qatar, and the Trucial States desired a formidable British presence in the Gulf. They regarded it as "protection against internal subversion, against any hope by their more powerful neighbors to swallow them up, or by one shaikhdom to take over another."¹⁰ But in highly uncharacteristic concert, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Iran all agreed the British should be out of the Gulf on schedule. Politically, Iraq had aligned opposite her ex-Mandatory tutor for years. Iran, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait opposed the continuation because they believed:

1. they now possess sufficient military power to handle regional defense;
2. British military strength amounts to only about 6,000 men, a totally inadequate force to provide realistic security;
3. the British troops are more likely to be an incitement to external groups than a deterrent; and
4. the British military presence might serve

⁹"Sir Alec Up the Gulf," The Economist 236 (18 July 1970): 14.

¹⁰Ibid.

as an excuse for some other extra-regional power (such as the Soviet Union or Red China) to establish a base in the Persian Gulf region.¹¹

Sir William Luce Appointed

Sir Alec returned to London in June 1970, without any real excuse for continuing the British presence in the Gulf. In recognition of the regional realities, and in the reaction to strong Foreign Office pressure to stick to the 1971 withdrawal deadline, and perhaps in the post-election easing of the political constraints, Sir Alec took a lesson from the shaikhs and decided to contract a study of the problem. He appointed Sir William Luce to be his special representative,¹² to systematically review the possibility of keeping British forces in the Gulf. The final Government decision on the matter would then be expected within

¹¹Roy E. Thomas, "The Persian Gulf Region," Current History 60 (January 1971): 43. Also see, Neville Brown, "Britain and the Gulf--don't go just yet please! The Wisdom of Withdrawal Reconsidered," New Middle East 24 (1 September 1970): 44.

¹²Times (London), 28 July 1970, p. 4. Sir Alec also replaced Political Resident Sir Stewart Crawford with Assistant Undersecretary of Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Sir Geoffrey Arthur, at this same time.

two months after the Luce report was submitted.¹³

It is difficult to fault the new Foreign Secretary's choice of Sir William Luce. A man eminently qualified, his experience, intelligence and demeanor well-suited him for his role as visiting fireman. His contacts in the Persian Gulf were formed during his days as Political Resident (he served in that capacity from 1961-1968). They were for the most part still active. He enjoyed the personal respect of each Gulf ruler, and his integrity was beyond reproach.¹⁴

On the other hand, Sir William had been on record strongly opposed to "going back on withdrawal." While critical of the timing and method of the original, 1968 decision, he adamantly believed that it "set certain processes in motion . . . [In the Gulf states that necessitated] ending of their status of British protected states and therefore of the basis of our present political and military position in the Gulf." No obstacles to a viable union would be removed by prolonging the British role beyond 1971, and there was

¹³Times (London), 28 September 1970, p. 4.

¹⁴Karim Shahr, interview, specifically confirmed this opinion. For a negative appraisal of the man, see Leonard Mosley, Power Plan: Oil in the Middle East (New York: Random House, 1973), p. 360.

nothing to prevent a successful union by that deadline.¹⁵ When first notified that he was being considered for the post, Sir William reminded Sir Alec of his publicly stated, personal conviction, and asked if in fact the new Prime Minister had changed his views on the question. Only after being assured that all members of the newly elected Government had "open minds" did Luce accept the appointment.¹⁶

Not everyone agrees with this official version of Sir William's duties. Sir Geoffrey Arthur offered the Foreign Office view, that the appointment of a special representative was required to supplement the efforts of the Gulf Political Resident in effecting the

¹⁵Sir William Luce, "A Naval Force for the Gulf: Balancing Inevitable Russian Penetration," Round Table 236 (October 1969): 355.

¹⁶Sir William Luce, interview, conducted at the Bath Club, London, 24 October 1973. The Foreign Minister's assertion that policy for withdrawal was undecided before Sir William's selection is disputed. Alvin J. Cottrell, "Conflict in the Persian Gulf," Military Review 51 (February 1971): 35, maintains that the Shah of Iran was specifically assured in June 1970 by Sir Alec Douglas-Home of the Tory Government's intention to be out by the end of 1971. This opinion was supported by Gulf expert Mr. Michael Burrell, during an interview held in his office at the University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, 25 October 1973.

the withdrawal. According to the Under-Secretary, the resolution of the Bahrain issue (see Chapter II) had been unduly delayed because there was no person in a position of responsibility who had the freedom of action to expedite the diplomatic maneuvering. The remaining issues, especially those with direct international ramifications (Abu Musa and Tumbs), required an action-officer to shepherd their resolution in the limited time available.¹⁷ The Times (London) had withheld comment on the governmentally alleged policy review, while editorially encouraging Sir William in his "urgent mission" to unite the shaikhdoms.¹⁸ Some more skeptical, (or perhaps less inhibited) observers considered the first function of the Luce Mission was to "report back and make it /i.e., withdrawal in accordance with the 1971 schedule/ look good to the Conservative Party."¹⁹ While most knowledgeable students of Gulf affairs perceived the inadvisability

¹⁷Undersecretary for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Sir Geoffrey Arthur, in an interview held in his office, Whitehall, London, 24 October 1973. He was non-committal concerning Sir William's role in the withdrawal decision.

¹⁸Times (London), 3 August 1970, p. 7.

¹⁹Michael Burrell, interview.

of further withdrawal delays, Sir William was one of the few capable of convincing the Conservative Party, in particular its right wing, to reverse their pre-election stance. It is this elusive political aspect of the Luce appointment which cannot be ignored when reviewing the curious evolution of the Conservative Government's Gulf policy.

Sir William Up The Gulf

Sir William contends that his primary task was to study the problem and recommend a proper policy. Upon his appointment, he set out for the Middle East, where he was cordially received throughout the Gulf and at Jidda, Tehran and Cairo. Only in Baghdad was the British diplomat snubbed and, in response, that was his last attempt to solicit the Iraqi view.²⁰

His initial survey revealed little that was new for Sir William. The Bahrainis, "as would any sensible people," wanted the best of two worlds. They enjoyed the independent status only recently conferred

²⁰Times (London), 18 August 1970, p. 4, and 23 September 1970, p. 8, report the progress of the Luce Mission. The Iraqi experience was directly related by Sir William Luce, interview. The Baath Government of Iraq refused to meet with him, technically because he lacked ministerial rank.

after the U.N. "ascertainment exercise", but hoped to retain an "undefined" Royal Navy or Air Force protective umbrella. The Qataris would probably have agreed to this, and the Trucial States Rulers expressed the desire for some continuing "small British presence" in the area.²¹ In July, 1970, Dubai's Shaikh Rashid averred that

all the Rulers and people of the Union (of Arab Emirates) would support the retention of British troops, even though . . . they would not give a direct answer out of respect for the general Arab view'.²²

On the contrary, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Iran vigorously opposed any extension of Britain's special relationship in the Gulf.²³

As Sir William made these initial rounds, his reputedly "open minded" (see above p. 91) Conservative Government persisted to posture as guardians of the Empire.²⁴ Sir Alec Douglas-Home declared: "This

²¹Sir William Luce, interview.

²²Quoted in New Middle East²⁴ (September 1970): 44.

²³Sir William Luce, interview. Also Times (London), 28 September 1970, p. 4, reports similar though less detailed conclusions.

²⁴See Times (London), 14 October 1970, p. 7, which reports Sir William's return to the Gulf amid government hints that an extension was probable.

Government has no intention of dropping out and leave the Communists to takeover an area where vital British interest lie."²⁵ But the Luce report was submitted by November, and it reaffirmed Sir William's previous opinions, urging adherence to the Labor Government's original guidelines.²⁶

The Policy Change

The impact of Sir William's recommendation was somewhat apparent when Prime Minister Heath, while decrying the increase in Soviet naval incursions in the area, adopted a more moderate tone in mid-November 1970. The Prime Minister said simply, "That's why we have a special representative discussing with leaders in the Gulf how we can help maintain stability in the area."²⁷ Only the month before, in a special supplementary Statement on Defense, Heath's own

²⁵Quoted in the Times (London), 10 October 1970, p. 4.

²⁶Sir William Luce, interview, 24 October 1973. He did drop his earlier proposal that a permanent Royal Navy contingent operate in the Gulf, having been enlightened in his official capacity of severe financial limitations on such a venture. That suggestion had been publicly floated in his article, "A Naval Force for the Gulf: Balancing Inevitable Russian Penetration," pp. 347-356.

²⁷Quoted in the Times (London), 17 November

Ministry had confidently reaffirmed that, "The government is determined to restore Britain's security to the high place it must take . . . and make good as far as possible the damage of successive defense reviews . . ." The carriers would stay into the 1970's and forces east of Suez would be increased.²⁸

But the February 1971 White Paper reverted to the earlier strong Tory line, promising a British naval force in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf, with long range reconnaissance squadrons based on Gan and Masira islands to counter the "growing Russian naval presence in the area."²⁹ At the House of Commons hearings on the Defense Review, Lord Balniel, the new Minister of State for Defense, also referred to

the dramatic expansion of the Soviet Navy of its modernization, its development in the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean . . . Massive military maneuvers on borders, continuous and visible naval presence off the shores--these things can win win objectives almost as valuable as any which can be won by direct military aggression It can make neutralism seem a pleasant soft option.

1970, p. 4.

²⁸ Great Britain, Cmd. 4521, p. 3.

²⁹ Great Britain, Ministry of Defense, The Defense Review, Cmd. 4592, p. 6.

Therefore, the Conservative Government was accelerating new warship construction to an "unprecedented rate" in peacetime. In the Gulf,

British forces are no longer permanently deployed, but we have not severed our connections with the area. There will be frequent visits by warships, Army units and aircraft . . . and a military advisory team will remain at Sharjah . . .³⁰

Incidentally, the Soviet reaction to all this is epitomized in an article by V. Zelenin: British troop withdrawals are a sham, Britain "has done nothing to change the standing of the area east of Suez with British imperialism, and there are many facts to show that Britain has no intention of giving up her influence in this area."³¹

But despite what the Conservatives or the Communists said, the die had been cast and things had irrevocably changed. Saudi Arabia and Iran had initiated extensive military and naval expansion programs. Kuwait and Britain had given the required three-year notice to terminate their mutual defense

³⁰Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), vol. 831 (1971): 1311-1317. Technically Lord Balniel was premature in stating that British forces were out of the Gulf. That would actually be effected later in 1971.

³¹"Britain's Maneuvers East of Suez,"

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 pact of 1961 in May 1968, in accordance with the Labor Government's announced withdrawal plans.³² The Conservatives' oft-stated intention to ignore these transitions merely distorted the regional accommodation to inevitable change by inhibiting the development of viable political institutions within and among the shaikhdoms. (See previous chapter). David Holden appreciated this fact when he wrote:

the most unfortunate aspect of the uncertainty about British intentions introduced by the Conservative Party and Government after 1968 was the encouragement it offered, until March of this year, to Bahrain, Qatar and the Trucial Shaikhdoms to postpone firm decisions about their own future in the hope that Britain might, after all, decide to stay on³³

Not until 1 March 1971, only nine months before the formal departure, did Prime Minister Heath's Government officially accept the recommendations in the Luce report. Sir Alec went before the Parliament and announced that Great Britain would offer a Treaty of Friendship, replacing existing agreements, and would also assist in the turnover of the Trucial Oman Scouts

International Affairs (Moscow), (November 1972): 45.

³²Times (London), 19:6, 20 May 1968, p. 32.

³³"The Persian Gulf: After the British Raj," Foreign Affairs 49 (July 1971): 730.

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to the Union Defense Force. Military advisors would be made available, with a small team stationed in Sharjah to act "in a liaison and training role" for British units that planned to periodically use the desert facilities.³⁴ Shadow Cabinet spokesman, Denis Healey, sarcastically retorted:

The opposition welcomes the Right Honorable Gentleman's conversion, however belated, to the views of the Labour Government, and we look forward to further conversions at an early date.³⁵

The Conducive Milieu

Sir William's report went beyond his primary mission to include a plea for deeper British involvement in establishing a union of emirates. He determined that the deliberate distance maintained by the Foreign Office had actually "thrown off" the rulers, who had become accustomed to close, open British involvement in all their important matters. The political rationale for the low profile (see Chapter III) notwithstanding, the federation was foundering and time was running out.³⁶

³⁴Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), vol. 812 (1971): 1228.

³⁵Ibid., col. 1230.

³⁶Luce, interview. Also the Times (London),

In October 1970, yet another gathering of the rulers broke up amid a clamor of mutual recriminations. Again the hopes for meaningful progress dissolved as Qataris accused Bahrainis of breaking their word on previous agreements on capital location,³⁷ while Bahrainis stiffened their demands for inclusion in the Union.³⁸ From Sir William Luce's perspective, the chronic quarreling among the shaikhs threatened the basic British interest in the future of the Gulf oil industry. In 1967, he maintained that the fundamental, post-war contribution of Britain's forces in the Persian Gulf had been to guarantee the stability essential to produce and distribute petroleum. He had anticipated the eventual withdrawal of those forces, and suggested:

Our aim should therefore be to do all we can to help bring about the sort of condition which would enable us to terminate honorably

14 October 1970, p. 7, reports Sir William's concern with the Union's development and resolution of local territorial disputes.

³⁷"The Gulf: Can't Stay, Can't Go," The Economist 237 (31 October 1970): 30.

³⁸Karim Shakr, interview. Also see Chapter III, above for exposition of the impact that the U.N. plebescite had on the Bahrain position in the UAE.

our special relationship with the Gulf States and to withdraw without undue risk to peace and stability.³⁹

This would require the active concurrence of the regional powers.

That same year, the Fabian Society had asserted that "The real need in the Gulf area . . . /was for/ additional British political efforts to produce a balance of power in the Gulf between Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait."⁴⁰ Luce himself later elaborated this theme, writing in 1969, over a year before his appointment as Special Representative:

the most important single contribution to peace that Her Majesty's Government could make in the Gulf . . . /would be to effect/ an understanding between Iran and Saudi Arabia regarding the status-quo of the Gulf States⁴¹

His idea was fundamental. The Economist had drawn the practical correlation between the regional powers and the federation's faltering: "The breakdown of the

³⁹"Britain and the Persian Gulf," Round Table 227 (July 1967): 280.

⁴⁰"Arabia: When Britain Goes," Fabian Society Research Series 259 (London, Fabian Society), April 1967, p. 19.

⁴¹Sir William Luce, "Britain's Withdrawal from the Middle East and the Persian Gulf," Journal of the Royal United Services Institute 114 (March 1969): 8.

negotiations for a federation could be connected with the position Iran has taken: at least one ruler is always ready to do what he thinks will please the Shah."⁴² By the same token, Saudi Arabia's concern over the implications that the Federation might have on her claim to Buraimi had prompted King Feisal to threaten forceful occupation of the oasis once Britain withdrew her protection from Abu Dhabi.⁴³

Neither Gulf Power's behavior was conducive to federating the shaikhdoms and creation of a more favorable regional climate had become imperative. Accordingly, once his policy recommendations were completed and submitted to the Foreign Secretary, Sir William began another intense round of international negotiations, this time aimed at developing a consensus on how the stability in the Gulf would be achieved.⁴⁴ Simultaneously, the Foreign Office undertook a complete analysis of the disengagement,

⁴²"The Gulf: Can't Stay, Can't Go," p. 33.

⁴³al-Rai al-Am (Kuwait), 19 May 1970, cited by Alvin J. Cottrell, "The United States and the Future of the Gulf after the Bahrain Agreement," New Middle East 22 (July 1970): 19.

⁴⁴See Times (London), 9 December 1970, p. 7 and 20 January 1971, p. 6. The negotiations ensued in Jedda, Tehran, Kuwait and London.

revitalizing the programs for transfer of functional responsibilities to include the retrocession of jurisdictional responsibilities, the turnover of defense forces and equipment, and their extensive consular, customs, and administrative services.⁴⁵ The British hoped to see both approaches coalesce prior to their pull-out, producing the regional stability deemed so essential to their interests.

Regional Detente: The Islands

As with the Bahrain dispute, latent Arab-Irani hostilities threatened to erupt over the Persian claim to the Gulf islands of Abu Musa and Tunbs. For years Iran had argued that these miniscule islands had been illegally appropriated by the British and transferred to their clients in Sharjah and Ras al-Khaima. No longer too weak to defend her own territory, a revitalized Persia would reassert her sovereignty. The Shah personally adopted an increasingly hard line, following his compromise on Bahrain. That had been a politically unpopular decision and drawn unexpectedly severe condemnation from his right-wing power base in

⁴⁵Sir William Luce, interview. Details of this aspect of the conservative Government's Gulf withdrawal will be treated in Chapter IV.

Iran (See Chapter III). The Iranian Government had to launch a major propaganda effort to convince the Persians that Bahrain's loss was necessary. The arch-conservative, Pan-Iranian Party was then suppressed for a year, after rejecting the Shah's concession.⁴⁶

Perhaps in reaction to this explosive, intangible element of national pride, the Shah reversed his June 1969 statement that "Once the question of Bahrain is settled there would be no objection to a federation of shaikhdoms."⁴⁷ He predicated Tehran's recognition of any shaikhly polity on their ascendance to his demands.⁴⁸ He insisted that was simply a reasonable quid pro quo for his relinquishing the Bahrain claim, and offered to further conciliate his Arab adversaries with substantial financial compensation.⁴⁹ The official rationale for Persia's renewed adamancy over

⁴⁶Times (London), 16 December 1970 (Special Report: Britain and the Gulf), p. 1. Mr. R. M. Burrell also emphasizes this point during an interview in his office at the University of London, 25 October 1973.

⁴⁷Times (London), 10 June 1969, p. 11 (Winston S. Churchill).

⁴⁸"The Gulf: Can't Stay, Can't Go," p. 33.

⁴⁹Times (London), 11 May 1971, p. 14 (Dennis Walters).

the islands was then declared: "If some nihilist power gets hold of the islands, then the consequences for the rest of us can be dangerous. Hence the islands have to be in safe hands."⁵⁰ Apparently the Shah concurred with Leonard Mosely's dictum that "... whoever controlled the Tubs controlled the straits."⁵¹

In February 1971, Sir William Luce notified the Shah that his Government would hold to the 1971 deadline. He did so slightly in advance of the public announcement before Britain's Parliament that March. This news appeared to satisfy the Shah, but the Persian ruler reiterated his own intention to take the islands by force should peaceful means fail prior to British withdrawal.⁵² His strategic defense needs were consistently cited in justification of his uncompromising stance. In June 1971, an Arab guerrilla attack on an Israeli-bound tanker at the narrow inlet to the Red Sea dramatically illustrated Iran's fears for the Gulf and the Shah often referred to this in subsequent

⁵⁰Quoted from an interview in the Indian magazine BLITZ, as reported in Times (London), 29 June 1971, p. 7.

⁵¹Leonard Mosely, Power Play: Oil in the Middle East (New York: Random House, 1973), p. 370.

⁵²Times (London), 15 February 1971, p. 7.

conversations with the British Representatives.⁵³ Yet most defense experts would agree, as did Sir William, that Iranian occupation of the islands were militarily superfluous; given the magnitude of the Persian arsenal based at Bandar Abbas near the Straits of Hormuz. It seemed that the Shah was using this strategic defense argument as a vehicle to press what had become a point of honor.⁵⁴

Sir William could well sympathize with the Shah's dilemma, for he too was captive to a precarious political commitment. His country was not only morally obliged to support the Arab claims, she was still legally committed to protect her charges in Sharjah and Ras al-Khaima from any foreign encroachments. Both British officials and the two shaikhs directly involved dreaded the political and economic repercussions of losing Arab soil and, not incidentally, its potential underlying oil deposits.⁵⁵ Yet paradoxically, the

⁵³See the New York Times, 15 June 1971, p. 7, for report on the incident.

⁵⁴Luce, interview. The Times (London), 20 May 1971, p. 6, editorially concludes that the Shah had staked his personal prestige on a favorable resolution of the islands issue.

⁵⁵Times (London), 16 December 1970 (Special Report: Britain and the Gulf), p. 1.

rulers of the other seven shaikhdoms attached little importance to the island problem. In part this was due to Shaikh Saqr's personal unpopularity,⁵⁶ and they also realized that Abu Musa would be successfully negotiated.⁵⁷ As Bahrain's U.N. diplomat, Karim Shakr, explained his Government's position, the islands dispute in no way jeopardized Bahraini integrity.⁵⁸ John Duke Anthony points out that thirteen of the Arab League member states also refused to get involved. This left only Iraq, the perennial gadfly, to stand with Shaikh Saqr against the Iranians.⁵⁹ Given such feeble support for the Arab cause, Sir William encountered a purposeful Shah in his quest for a diplomatic solution to the confrontation considered so inimicable to British interests.

It was from this unenviable bargaining position

⁵⁶Luce, interview.

⁵⁷Moseley, Power Play, p. 370.

⁵⁸Interview. Author Joseph Malone intimates Britain's restraint stemmed from a secret arrangement made in relation to the U.N. settlement of the Iranian claim. See, The Arab Lands of Western Asia (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973), p. 241.

⁵⁹John Duke Anthony, "The Union of Arab Amirates," Middle East Journal 26 (Summer 1972), 285.

that Sir William proposed a compromise to the Shah. Iranian troops could be stationed on the islands, while Arabian sovereignty was left, at least theoretically, intact.⁶⁰ The British Government tacitly endorsed such an arrangement. Sir Alec Douglas-Home warned a May 1971 CENTO gathering in Ankara, "new naval and military presences [the Soviets] are materializing round the periphery of the CENTO area are profoundly changing the strategic picture." Iranian Foreign Minister Zahedi, at the same meeting, reiterated the need for "securing" the islands.⁶¹ Significantly, U.S. Secretary of State Rusk used the same occasion to call for "regional states" to take responsibility for the Persian Gulf.⁶²

Within two weeks the Iranians responded to the encouragement, though more forcefully than had been anticipated. Officially protesting the presence of British air and naval operations near the "Iranian islands" of Abu Musa and Tunbs, Tehran threatened to

⁶⁰Times (London), 15 February 1971, p. 1.

⁶¹Both quoted in the Times (London), 1 May 1971, p. 4.

⁶²Ibid.

fire on any planes that violated its airspace in the future.⁶³ Once again Luce witnessed the raising of Arab-Iranian tensions. Kuwait's Al-Rai al-Amm decried Iran's use of "force, controversy and domination attempts" which the Kuwait Daily News had termed "modern piracy."⁶⁴

Such realistic criticism reinforced Sir William's consistent attempts to convince the Shah that a military solution was undesirable. Still, the Persian monarch continued to brandish the growing Iranian muscle. Quite possibly, he was the victim of short-sighted, self-serving advisors, who found it expedient to play down any potential Arab reaction. Sir William notes that the Shah did not seem to appreciate the danger until September 1971, and only then did he opt for a compromise on Abu Musa.⁶⁵ This may explain the sudden shift in the Iranian official statements, from being highly critical of Britain's backing for the Arabs to crediting Whitehall as the honest broker in seeking a solution to the

⁶³Times (London), 10 May 1971, p. 5.

⁶⁴Cited in Times (London), 2 July 1971, p. 8.

⁶⁵Sir William Luce, interview.

disagreement.⁶⁶ It is also instructive to notice that Iran's Foreign Minister Zahedi was replaced by Dr. Abbas Khalatbari during this same time frame.⁶⁷ Whatever the cause for conversion, during the waning weeks of Britain's presence the Shah evinced a new flexibility over the islands issue.

Often with Gulf politics, tough talk conceals accommodations. On 10 November 1971, Foreign Minister Khalatbari bluntly denied that Iran would negotiate the sovereignty of the islands.⁶⁸ Sharjah's Ruler, Shaikh Khalid agitatedly rejected a proposal that

affected our sovereignty and demanded selling the island, otherwise it would be taken by force. Our reply to Luce was that we would never give up our sovereignty and right to the island.⁶⁹

But by mid-November, the Shah and the Shaikh had "agreed to disagree" on the sovereignty issue, settling on the military occupation compromise first suggested by the British ten months earlier.⁷⁰ Sir William, on

⁶⁶Times (London), 5 October 1971, p. 11.

⁶⁷R. M. Burrell, The Persian Gulf (New York: Library Press, 1972), p. 44.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Quoted in the Times (London), 2 November 1971, p. 8.

⁷⁰Sir William Luce, interview.

completion of a six-day visit to Tehran, could finally say, "Iran and Britain have sorted out their differences . . . The shaikhdoms can now form their federation."⁷¹

Shaikh Khalid probably succumbed to the financial inducements: £1.5 million per year from Iran until his oil revenues reached £3 million annually, and the promise to share equally in any oil profits derived from Abu Musa's territorial waters. In exchange, the Iranians were officially welcomed to the island by the Ruler on 30 November 1971.⁷² Shaikh Saqr, one of the wildest characters in the Gulf, would have gladly accepted a similar disposition, but never had the chance. Instead, his islands fell to a Persian force majeure. Contradicting widespread reports that the irascible old Shaikh's quixotic nostalgia for the ancient Qawasim glories combined with a futile hope for an oil strike had prompted his obdurate stance,⁷³

⁷¹Quoted in the Times (London), 18 November 1971, p. 7.

⁷²Times (London), (Special Report on the UAE), 21 December 1971, p. 1.

⁷³See Mosley, Power Play, pp. 369-371. Also Times (London) (Special Report on the UAE), 21 December 1971, p. 1. Michael Burrell, interview, concurs with this explanation.

Sir William maintains that Saqr "bent over backwards" to forestall the clash. It was the Shah who "dug his heels," convinced to the end that the Tunbs were unquestionably Iranian.⁷⁴ Several observers have implied since that there was British collusion in the Iranian invasion of the islands, but most fell short of Leonard Mosley. He alleged a Luce-Saqr conspiracy to effect a face-saving martyrdom of the police unit assigned to defend the Tunbs.⁷⁵ Sir William convincingly states that he warned Shaikh Saqr to remove his men from harm's way,⁷⁶ and can only wonder at what Britain had to gain by the inevitable bloodshed that ensued. A more likely explanation is that Saqr had overcommitted himself to resist, and risked his men to complete the scenario of the latter-day Grecian tragedy.⁷⁷ There can be no doubt however that Shaikh

⁷⁴Sir William Luce, interview. Mr. A. Reeve, interview, added that Shaikh Saqr could have accepted financial compensation equal to that given Shaikh Khahid, but Iran would not consider even a tacit recognition of Res al Khamir's claim to sovereignty.

⁷⁵Leonard Mosley, Power Play, pp. 372-373.

⁷⁶Sir William Luce, interview.

⁷⁷According to Sir William Luce, interview, Saqr's refusal to withdraw his forces cost the lives of one Arab policeman and three Iranian naval personnel.

Saqr "gained from the propaganda portraying him as a quasi-martyr for refusing to the end to concede the right of Iran to occupy a part of the Arab homeland."⁷⁸

Considering Iran's military capacity and her oft-expressed intention to use it to secure the islands, the question of Britain's role in the Tunbs occupation becomes at best academic. At Persopolis in October 1971, the world witnessed an unprecedented display of Iranian opulence. The ostensible purpose for the controversial celebration had been to commemorate the twenty-fifth centennial of the Persian Empire. The fact that the dignitaries assembled nine years after the logical birthday, the anniversary of the capture of Babylon, and two months before Britain's withdrawal, provides the clue to the real purpose for the soiree. The Shah was parading his power and, as The Economist added, ". . . the demonstration of power is generally followed by the use of it."⁷⁹ Britain's emissary had arranged the Abu Musa settlement and, once he failed to persuade the Shah to compromise on Tunbs, the

⁷⁸Anthony, p. 285.

⁷⁹"After Persopolis," The Economist 241
23 October 1971): 15-16.

British no longer played an active role in high Gulf politics. After the Iranians took the island the official spokesman for Her Majesty's Government apologized meekly, protesting that his country "could hardly be expected to exercise her treaty responsibilities on the final day."⁸⁰ The torch had been passed, and, as Sir William Luce himself once saw fit to put down, "to fill a power vacuum effectively requires the ultimate sanction of some degree of military power."⁸¹

Regional Detente--The Arabs

No such logical rationalization is possible when describing Britain's policy or part in resolving the other international claim to the shaikhdoms' land, that which centered on the Buraimi oasis. (See Chapter I, pp. 13-15) Unlike the islands dispute, where the inherent dangers in an Arab-Persian conflict was obvious and the utility of British mediation defined, Buraimi was deeply enmeshed in the matrix of Arabian

⁸⁰Quoted in the Times (London), 1 December 1971, p. 1.

⁸¹"Britain's Withdrawal from the Middle East and the Persian Gulf," p. 6.

peninsular politics. The issue involved traditional rivalries and oil profits, always an explosive combination. Yet the days when Britain could impose even the status-quo were over.

On the other hand, the Buraimi oasis problem could not be ignored. In May 1970, King Feisal had unexpectedly renewed his claim, demanding a plebescite and several territorial adjustments affecting large tracts of Abu Dhabi territory.⁸² Abu Dhabi's Ruler, Shaikh Zayd, was born at Buraimi and was governor of the area when last the Saudis pressed their claim in the 1950's. He had vowed "at all costs to hold onto it," and indeed this was the raison d'etre for his impressive Abu Dhabi Defense Force.⁸³ A massive experimental project sponsored by the Abu Dhabi Department of Agriculture had already transformed "the whole character" of the oasis, in mute testimony to Shaikh Zayd's intransigence.⁸⁴ The personal animosity

⁸²Times (London) 16 July 1970, p. 4.

⁸³"Countdown for a Federation," The Economist (Special Survey of the Arabian Peninsula) 235 (6 June 1970): 34. The Economist shared Shaikh Zayd's view that Buraimi was essential to his state.

⁸⁴See J. H. Stevens, "Changing Agricultural Practices in an Arabian Oasis," The Geographical Journal 136, (September 1970): 410-418.

mutually shared by the two Arab Rulers exacerbated the seemingly irreconcilable situation, and had been reinforced most recently during Shaikh Zayd's "dis-asterous visit" to King Feisal's court in May 1970.⁸⁵

Epitomizing their Government's new Gulf role, Sir William Luce and his colleagues could only propose compromise. They hoped somehow to avoid what would be a catastrophic confrontation. The British suggested a plan to provide Saudi Arabia an access strip of land to the sea for a pipeline corridor between Qatar and Abu Dhabi.⁸⁶ They then tried tirelessly to persuade King Feisal to drop his demands which threatened to finish the oil rich shaikhdom of the Bani Yas and, with it, any hopes for a union of the other emirates.

Some writers have linked the Buraimi dispute with a British-engineered palace coup in nearby Oman.⁸⁷ There in July 1970, the thirty-year-old son of Said bin

⁸⁵Times (London) (Special Report: Britain and the Gulf), 16 December 1970, p. I, (A. M. Rendel).

⁸⁶Times (London), 28 September 1970, p. 4.

⁸⁷See Leonard Mosley, Power Play, pp. 362-368, for a colorful account of the coup. He errors in assigning a major role to Sir William Luce. Besides Luce was only appointed as Special Emissary to the Gulf after the events in Oman had run their course.

Taimer replaced his father as Sultan, allegedly instigated by Britain to facilitate a peaceful Buraimi settlement.⁸⁸ This view overemphasizes and incorrectly isolates the oasis conflict. The Omani action was taken in a much wider context. Internal security in Muscat and Oman, a pathetically medieval sultanate with borders inextricably mixed with the Trucial States, had deteriorated so much that overall regional stability was threatened. (See Chapter IV). Five days before the overthrow, The Economist declared:

The Government can no longer afford to shut its eyes to the dangers of the situation in Muscat. The Sultan and his advisors will have to be persuaded to go before it is too late for an alternative ruler to hold the country together.⁸⁹

Just as the conflicting Abu Musa and Tunbs claims had to be resolved before Great Britain's withdrawal, the creation of a viable political structure in the Gulf also necessitated correcting the Omani aberration.

⁸⁸See G. L. Bondarevskiy, "The Continuing Western Interest in Oman as Seen from Moscow," New Middle East 35 (August 1971): 14.

⁸⁹"Sir Alec Up the Gulf," The Economist 236 (18 July 1970): 14-15. Iranian Foreign Minister Zahedi called for the replacement of the Sultan of Oman, who, like Shakhbut in Abu Dhabi a few years before, was obstructing necessary reforms. Times (London), 13 April 1970, p. 4.

Britain had a distinct role to play in each of these settlements, but Buraimi was integrally bound up in the Arab order.⁹⁰ British officials could advise and even assist in its working-out, but they could not resolve it. Instead, the Buraimi dispute was absorbed in the more basic problem, forming indigenous governmental institutions in the shaikhdoms that could accept the British mantle. Accordingly, Britain directed her subsequent efforts toward establishing those successor states.

⁹⁰Times (London), 11 February 1971, p. 12. (Paul Martin) reports King Faisal's willingness to drop the Buraimi claim in exchange for the cooperation of the nine rulers in forming a federation.

CHAPTER FOUR

ESTABLISHING THE SUCCESSOR STATES

The two major British political parties had participated, both as the Opposition and as the Government, in Britain's withdrawal from the Persian Gulf. Each influenced events uniquely, sometimes reinforcing but oftentimes diminishing the diplomatic implementation of stated British policies. Foreign Office initiatives could never be divorced from the influences of domestic politics but, with the relatively apolitical turnover of Britain's governmental responsibilities in the Gulf, the diplomats could and did execute the actual exchange of duties. In the Fall of 1970, Sir William Luce recommended that Whitehall intensify the British effort in assisting the federation of Gulf Emirates. A project analysis was undertaken to decide the scenario for completing the withdrawal process by 1971. Practical goals were identified, specific tasks defined and priorities assigned. Those governmental agencies expected to assume once-British functions were identified, and the need to create certain replacement institutions was

established.¹

The Federation Founders

But the success of this ambitious if belated scheme to systematize the withdrawal was predicated upon the existence of one or more successor states to take over from the British, yet this was by no means assured. As late as February 1971, British officials in the Gulf were reportedly "in despair" at the lack of progress toward a union of shaikhdoms,² and an ominous pessimism even pervaded Arab circles. Radio Cairo had consistently agitated against the British presence, reflecting Egyptian suspicions that the Conservative Government intended to remain. As late as October 1970, it proclaimed the need for a workable federation to deny Britain any excuse for maintaining troops on Arab soil. But by February 1971, the "Voice of the Arabs" program was

¹The Project Manager, then Trucial States Desk Officer, Mr. Anthony Reeve, discussed this specific approach to expediting the withdrawal during an interview in his British Embassy office, Washington, D.C., 1 October 1973. Patrick Bannerman, Middle East expert in the Foreign Office Research Department confirmed this during the interview held at his Whitehall office, London, 25 October 1973.

²Times (London), 11 February 1971, p. 11.

reduced to arguing that "total or partial withdrawal from the region ought not to be carried out while the region is divided."³ Cairo recognized that shaikhly accord would serve the Arab cause, but the Rulers could not accomodate their own diversity when allocating power within a federation. This was the same obstacle that had stymied the renowned Egyptian lawyer, Dr. Mohammad Sanhuri Pasha, who had tried to propose some kind of Union constitution since being hired for the job by the Federation of Arab Emirates in July 1968.⁴

On his initial fact-finding trip to the Gulf in August 1970, Special Envoy Luce perceived the sources of discord inherent in uniting the nine emirates. Although both Saudi Arabia and Kuwait wanted to see only one, Arab successor state, Sir William recognized the basic incompatibility between the larger and more sophisticated shaikhdoms and their more primitive neighbors. This conflict epitomized the traditional distain and distrust that existed between city merchants and desert Bedouin,

³Quoted by D. C. Watt, "The Arabs, the Heath Government and the Future of the Gulf," New Middle East 30 (March 1971): 26-27.

⁴Times (London), 8 July 1968, p. 4. Sanhuri authored Kuwait's constitution following Britain's withdrawal there.

rich and poor, and within the tribal societies of the Gulf. But the British Special Envoy also realized the need to accomodate the views of Riyadh and Kuwait. They wanted only one new Arab state in the Gulf and, without their approval, no shaikhly polities left by Britain could long survive her withdrawal.

Accordingly, British efforts to foster an emirate union were coordinated with those of the two Arab powers. A joint Saudi-Kuwaiti mission to help forge a federation of nine shaikhdoms was formed at the British behest in August 1970.⁵ Together, the Anglo-Arab mediation teams urged the Rulers to accept a single defense force, union financing on a per-capita income basis, centralized developmental program management and uniform customs and tariffs.⁶ A plan for federal representation was also devised, wherein Sir William Luce proposed to seat six delegates from Bahrain, Qatar, Abu Dhabi and Dubai. to every four from Sharjah, Umm al Quwain and Fujaira respectively.⁷ This raised much local interest but, although vigorous consultations proceeded

⁵Sir William Luce, interview held at the Bath Club, London, 24 October 1973.

⁶Times (London), 11 February 1971, p. 12 (Paul Martin).

⁷Ibid., Also Karim Shakr, Second Secretary of the

for months, even this concerted diplomatic offensive eventually dissolved in the familiar caldron of emirate animosity.

Blame for the Anglo-Arab failure to move the rulers has been ascribed to both parties. Saudi Arabia's Prince Nawaf and Kuwait's Shaikh Sabah al Ahmed, co-leaders of their joint mission, allegedly displayed a condescending arrogance toward the emirs. Most observers debate only the degree to which this complicated the already sensitive negotiations. Sir William Luce claimed that the Arab envoys had transformed two problems, capital location and assembly composition, into seven.⁸ Shaikh Rashid al Makhtoum agreed that "Before the mission set out there were only two obstacles to federation . . . /but after the Saud-Kuwaiti assistance/ now there are eleven."⁹ The Dubai ruler also expressed his disappointment with British officials a month later. Complaining when the Tories announced that they would adhere to the 1971 withdrawal deadline,

Bahrain Permanent Mission to the United Nations, interview at his office, New York, 25 September 1973.

⁸Sir William Luce, interview.

⁹Quoted in the Times (London), 11 February 1971, p. 12.

Raschid revealed:

I am prepared to be frank with them; but they come along at times and say 'this is our decision' and you are not given any opportunity to express your own views.¹⁰

The British diplomats assigned to the Gulf might legitimately echo these sentiments. were they not professionally constrained from doing so. As the previous chapters described, they were themselves surprised by H. M. Government on several occasions.

Finding fault was easier than forming a federation, and serious fissures began to appear in the foundation laid in 1968. Ras al Khaima's enigmatic Shaikh Saqr hinted darkly that he might bring the four smallest shaikhdoms under the rule of the Sultan of Muscat: "Our passports do not say 'Ras al Khaima!' They say Oman . . . we may find that the future of Oman and Omanis lies there."¹¹ The Times reported that Abu Dhabi, Qatar

¹⁰Times (London), 3 March 1971, p. 6.

¹¹Quoted in the Times (London), 11 February 1971, p. 12. Patrick Bannerman, of the Foreign Office Research Department noted that while Saqr's remarks make geographical sense, the extended British relationship in the Trucial States had made any such union politically infeasible, interview. Also see, J. C. Wilkinson, "The Oman of South-East Arabia," The Geographical Journal 139 (September 1971): 361-371.

and Dubai's Shaikh Raschid lent credence to these reports castigating the Bahrainis for their intransigence, and adding that "they simply don't want a union."¹² Still, Gulf savants tended to discount the possibility of Qatar voluntarily diluting her independence in any sized union without a corresponding gesture from Bahrain. Most agreed with Shaikh Raschid's opinion of Bahrain's commitment to federate, but fully expected the regimes in Manama and Doha to remain unfettered.

In point of political fact, Bahrain's Shaikh Isa had no option. Despite his desire to appease the Saudis, his public opinion solidly opposed joining any but a Bahrain-dominated union. That was clearly unacceptable to the other eight shaikhdoms. As one correspondent wrote, "A contrary decision /by Shaikh Isa/ would almost certainly have landed his government in an upsurge of unrest or worse . . ."¹³ In view of the impasse, Sir William Luce forced a decision from the Arabs.

April 1971, finally saw a Bahraini mission

¹²Luce, interview. Also see Times (London), 20 May 1971, p. 6.

¹³Times (London) (Special Report: Bahrain), 16 December 1971, p. I. (A. M. Rendel). Also Karim Shakr, interview.

dispatched to the Riyadh court 'to give King Feisal the news he dreaded: there would be no federation of nine.¹⁴ It was a difficult assignment for the delegation. Themselves dependent on Saudi crude oil to feed their BAPCO refinery, the Bahrainis had every incentive to appease their benefactor. Both traditional custom and realistic politics tightened that economic bond. Therefore, when the head of the House of Saud requested that they defer publicizing the break for yet another unspecified interval, the delegates were disheartened. They knew there could be no turning back, and any delay would surely prove an unpleasant limbo. The Bahrainis ultimately convinced King Feisal of their precarious position, mixing impassioned entreaties and reasoned arguments. Only then did the King consent to limit the span to eight weeks.¹⁵

The Al Khalifa emissaries used that time to solicit support from the al Sabah in Kuwait. Family ties and a common interest in prolonging traditional rule in the region encouraged alliance between the two

¹⁴ Sir William Luce had preempted them by a matter of days, but Feisal refused to concede the failure then. (See Chapter Three, p. , footnote 89).

¹⁵ Sir William Luce, interview.

most populous Gulf shaikhdoms.' Great Britain shared their stake in mutual security and tacitly approved the venture. Her Majesty's diplomats discerned no threat to postwithdrawal stability in an independent Qatar, the economically secure Wahabi state contiguous with Saudi Arabia, but the seven Trucial States needed help. Accordingly, the Foreign Office devoted its efforts to resuscitating their Union, while the Saudis evinced a benign if haughty neglect of subsequent shaikhly affairs.¹⁶ Sir William Luce pressed to remove the Iranian obstacle raised with the islands dispute (See Chapter Three) and Sir Geoffry' Arthur accelerated the turnover of functional responsibilities.¹⁷

The Retrocession of Legal Jurisdiction*

The Anglo-Saxon addiction to legalistic precision spawned the most complicated project for the Political

¹⁶Times (London), 20 May 1971, p. 6. Also see "The Gulf: If Not Nine, Maybe Seven," The Economist 239 (12 June 1971): 40.

¹⁷Sir Geoffry Arthur, Under-Secretary for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, interview held at his Whitehall office, London 24 October 1973.

*This phrase was uniformly used by British sources to describe the process described below.

Residency, the retrocession of jurisdiction in the Gulf. Through that office, Britain had exercised legal authority over Commonwealth Moslems and all non-Moslems in the protectorates. An intricate matrix of laws, legal precedents and commercial codes had evolved and been integrated into each shaikhdom's individual Sharia system. In effect, the Rulers had surrendered certain sovereign rights to Great Britain, an anachronistic legacy that was already being rectified by progressive British officials prior to the 1968 announcement. But the resumption of emirate legal perogatives was an agonizingly slow process. Suitable courts had to be established, procedural codes drawn up, and previous judgments (reached under the British judiciary) validated. Most laws were retroceded by one major exception was Qatar. There, following her premature declaration of imminent independence in September 1971, British jurisdiction over Pakistani Moslems (as a social class) was passed to Doha's auspices.¹⁸

Retrocession proceded in a piecemeal, often tedious sequence. Each ruler's legal advisor, an Arab but not always a native of the shaikhdom concerned,

¹⁸

Sir Geoffry Arthur, interview.

would draft a tentative replacement law for one covering a similar legal aspect under the British court. This would then be submitted in Arabic to British officials for review. The law would be translated¹⁹ and its workability assessed. Then the appropriate shaikh would be advised of any necessary amendments. Britain conceived of her role as advisory and not approbatory, attempting to build in safeguards against abuses of the new and untried regulations. Since the legal innovations would also have to conform with international standards, British advice and experience was especially useful. The issue of capital punishment, abolished in the United Kingdom but very much in the Moslem legal tradition, also posed a difficult challenge to British counselors seeking to balance the desert's harsh justice with more modern penal moderation. In all cases, once Anglo-Arab concert was achieved, the Political Resident on Bahrain would announce his "find" and publish what was termed a Queen's Regulation. This notified those concerned that a specific British jurisdiction would cease by a certain date, usually two

¹⁹Originally by the Foreign Office, but as the volume increased, this was contracted to a commercial firm in Beirut.

months later.²⁰

The timeliness of this legal turnover varied with each state. In Bahrain, a legislative committee under the able Hussein al Baharna and Said Jassim al Arayadh drew on Kuwaiti and Egyptian precedents to enact a sophisticated follow-on system.²¹ In Qatar, where Sharia Law prevailed exclusively, retrocession of jurisdiction was completed only the day before independence, with more than a degree of "undue haste."²² The Political Residency in the Gulf had conducted what were in effect the final Capitulation Courts on earth, and the successful retrocession of legal jurisdiction carried profound and historic implications.

The Shaikhdoms Assume Responsibility for Their Foreign Affairs

Transferring Britain's conduct of foreign affairs on behalf of her Protectorates, also of significant moment in the wider context of Middle East history, was

²⁰Mr. Anthony Reeve, former Foreign Office Trucial States Desk Officer (1970-1972), interview held at his British Embassy Office, Washington, D.C., 1 October 1973.

²¹Times (London) (Special Report: Bahrain), 16 December 1971, p. II, (W. M. Ballantyne).

²²Sir Geoffry Arthur, interview.

less exacting a process. This imprecision related more to the activity being exchanged than to the actors involved in the process. As elsewhere in the functional turnover, the pace varied with the shaikhdom's relative political development.

All fell short of Bahrain, where a department of foreign affairs had been formed late in 1968. It operated under the title of "Special Office" until the island's independence. Prospective foreign service officers were sent to observe diplomatic posts in Kuwait, Cairo and Cyprus (another independent island state with a potent national minority), and to the headquarters of the Arab League. Other Bahrainis acquired field experience through actual service in Kuwaiti and Saudi Arabian embassies. Significantly, this program was not prompted by the British advisors, but was "strictly a domestic initiative."²³

This manifests an essential change in foreign policy perspectives and objectives for the shaikhdoms. Where British interests had previously influenced positions taken and procedures followed in Gulf foreign

²³

Karim Shahr, interview. Patrick Bannerman, interview confirmed this from the British side.

affairs, henceforth Arab ends would be paramount.²⁴ The Foreign Office accepted this and made no effort to "create bodies for administrative staffs for the /Shaikhdoms' foreign offices." Britain did render assistance in more technical, consular and international, areas. Joining the United Nations, affiliating with the World Bank and participating in the World Health Organization were uniformly accomplished by the shaikhdoms under British guidance. Her Majesty's expertise was less effective in handing over consular affairs. That ranged from "smooth" in Bahrain²⁵ to chaotic in the Union of Arab Emirates, where the time-honored "No Objection Certificate" was going for about fifty Bahraini Dinars by mid-1971.²⁶

Governmental Institutions

Other British-inspired governmental institutions received similar short shrift, as the Arabs showed an

²⁴Phillip Griffen, Charge d'Affairs at the American Embassy to the Union of Arab Emirates, in an interview held at the U.S. Department of State, Washington, D.C., 17 August 1973, acknowledged that this "complete break" in the conduct of foreign policy occurred after the Treaty System ended.

²⁵Karim Shakr, interview.

²⁶This reflected both inexperience and nascent corruption within the system.

increasing tendency to discard rather than transform the old structures. The Trucial States Council, since 1965 earmarked by the British as the nucleus for local self-government, was simply replaced by the Federation's Supreme Council in 1968. Despite assurances from Union President, Shaikh Zayd, to maintain and utilize the experienced staff of the Trucial States Development Office, its operating funds trickled to a stop and its highly competent staff personnel were forced to seek employment elsewhere.²⁷ Viewed by the Arabs as primarily a British agency, the Rulers had allowed its functions to be absorbed by a variety of Union ministries.²⁸

Britain's waning influence was also apparent in the economic realm. For years her Commercial Officers in the Gulf had advocated the creation of a common currency to replace the Qatar-Dubai Riyal and Bahrain Dinar (BD1=QR10 and BD1=US\$2.11).²⁹ This advice was

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Patrick Bannerman, interview.

²⁹United States Department of State, Background Notes: United Arab Emirates, Department of State Pub. no. 7901 rev. (1972), p. 3.

apparently accepted by the nine rulers, who appointed Qatar to supervise development of a federal monetary system in the early stages of the federation.³⁰ But later, not only was the dual currency criticized by Arab fiscal authorities, but representative voices in Gulf financial circles began to question even the sterling linkage to any Union specie.³¹ Both the Dinar and the Riyal were bound to the Pound under identical regulations, and the same economic dislocations that forced Britain's withdrawal were aggravating the already rampant inflation in the oil-booming Gulf. By 1971, the outmoded and inadequate dual currency system could only account for one-third of the total money and ten per-cent of the total economic assets or liabilities within the Union. Still, British advisors could not persuade the Trucial State rulers to meet even the minimum need for a currency and credit board endowed with the "urgently needed powers of a central banking institution to cope with pressing problems."³² Each Ruler hoarded

³⁰Times (London), 4 June 1968, p. 5.

³¹Times (London), 10 June 1969, p. 16, (Hazim Chalabi).

³²Times (London) (Special Report: Union of Arab Emirates), 21 December 1971, p. III, (Adnan B. Mahhouk).

his wealth and jealously guarded financial prerogatives. Shaikh Raschid of Dubai, where the banks were "almost an unpaid arm of the State" because there was no state office of finance, was the most ardent proponent of fiscal autonomy.³³ His shaikhdom helped mint one of the two coins of the realm. Classically illustrating the political implications of the coinage issue, Shaikh Raschid drew on all his renowned cunning to frustrate the trend toward commercial unity.

British council was consistently rejected across the economic spectrum, as the Rulers regressed into familiar behavior patterns that placed a premium on status symbols instead of coordinated industrial development. The fate of the Trucial States Development Office portended a wasteful race to duplicate prestige facilities. Four fully-equipped, modern international airports (at Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Qatar and Bahrain, with Sharjah planning yet another) were in operation before the Treaty System ended. Two major port development projects underway in Bahrain and Dubai were economically defensible.

³³Financial Times 16 December 1971, p. 13 (Richard Johns). Also see Michael Field's article titled "Rivalry between states leads to lack of cooperation and wasteful development," Times (London) (Special Report), 16 December 1970, p. III.

These were being matched at immense cost by Sharjah and Abu Dhabi, both of which were economically superfluous and only indirectly related to and not needed for the shipment of oil. A Saudi Arabian cement plant could have been expanded to meet regional requirements, but Qatar, Dubai and Ras al Khaima elected to build their own. Abu Dhabi planned to follow suit.³⁴ This same imitative propensity led Qatar to prepare a feasibility study on a \$100 million aluminium plant within a year of her independence. Bahrain was already producing 120,000 tons of aluminium a year from its Aluminium Bahrain (ALBA) smelters (British companies are major shareholders in ALBA), and the paucity of human resources in Qatar simply compounded the folly in planning such labor-intensive industries.³⁵ Obviously, more than British diplomats were needed to instill the Gulf nabobs with the political acumen and will to coordinate expenditures and effect necessary development.

London's diminishing influence also affected

³⁴Times (London) (Special Report), 16 December 1970, p. III. (Michael Field). Qatar, Ministry of Information, Qatar into the Seventies 1973, pp. 115-139 and also UAE, Ministry of Information, UAE First Anniversary 1972, pp. 26-27.

³⁵Times (London), 15 May 1972, p. 1. For facts on ALBA see "Industry," Middle East Sketch (15 December

British trade relationship with the Gulf states. Once compliant Shaikhs dealt daily with their British advisors, who steadily provided information and contracts. Diplomatic and commercial attaches supplied British businessmen what London's Chamber of Commerce euphemistically termed "invaluable guidance and assistance."³⁶ Naturally, Whitehall sought to offset the loss of that implicit advantage in her "special relationship," and to devise some formula for prolonging her local economic predominance. Efforts to continue some exceptional British connection were hampered, however, by the general reluctance of the shaikhs to make basic commitments toward federation. In 1968, the rulers established a Committee for Customs and Trade and enacted a provision barring approval of its recommendations until the Union was formed.³⁷ This prolonged the dual currencies and five separate tariff scales that, in themselves, inhibited the steps to federation. The Catch 22 predicament precluded negotiations which might

1972): 21-28.

³⁶A Survey for Businessmen: States of the Arabian Gulf (London: Chamber of Commerce, 1969), p. 6.

³⁷Times (London) (Special Report), 16 December 1970, p. III, (Michael Field).

have transformed Britain's beneficial entre to the Gulf markets under the Treaty System to one consistent with the fully independent status of the new Arab states.

This also coincided with the rulers' growing recalcitrance toward any foreign manipulation. Even during withdrawal, British business interests had to fend for themselves in a highly competitive environment. As the Washington Post put it:

/The/ Persian Gulf governments, once door-mats of the multinational business world, /were/ rapidly changing not only their own societies but also the structure of the international oil trade . . . "38

In response, Britain's relative portion of the import and export markets of Qatar and the Trucial States had dropped,³⁹ though in Bahrain she maintained her proportional domination.⁴⁰ This difference springs

³⁸Washington Post, 22 July 1973, p. C1, (Jim Hoagland).

³⁹Qatar, Ministry of Information, Qatar into the Seventies 1973, pp. 115-139, and UAE, Ministry of Information, UAE First Anniversary 1972, pp. 26-27, and pp. 7-10. The Financial Times, 25 April 1972, p. 25. Also see A Survey for Businessmen: States of the Arabian Gulf, pp. 30, 33, 35, and the Times (London) (Special Report: Britain and the Gulf), 16 December 1970.

⁴⁰See Bahrain, Ministry of Information, The State of Bahrain (1971), p. 19. Also The Financial Times, 25 April 1972, p. 25, for statistics.

more from the maturity and diversification of Bahrain's commerce than any adroit British maneuvering during withdrawal. In 1969, Her Majesty's Export Credits Guarantee Department rated the tiny shaikhdom as high as any nation "in the third world and the £53 million cover given for the (ALBA) smelter was the highest for any single project."⁴¹ Thus Britain's economic edge in Bahrain, as in the other eight shaikhdoms, was simply a function of her long business experience in the Gulf. This was not an overly significant advantage given the nature and rapidity of change in that marketplace.

Security Affairs

Whitehall's marginal performance in the economic sphere can be somewhat justified given the customary passivity of the Foreign Office in strictly commercial affairs. On the other hand, Gulf stability had been the raison d'etre for the British military presence, and its

⁴¹Financial Times, 25 April 1972, p. 25. (Richard Johns). For details on the Aluminium Bahrain (ALBA) project see "Industry: Industrial diversification," Middle East Sketch 1 (15 December 1972): 21-26. Significantly, both interviews with U.S. Charge d'Affairs Griffin and Foreign Office Research expert Bannerman brought out the critical shortage of trained people throughout the shaikhdoms and in particular within the Union of Arab Emirates.

continuance was the practical objective of the British withdrawal policy. Achieving that would be no mean feat. Volatile economic, educational and political disparities abounded. The Middle East's Arab-Israeli conflict spilled over most tangibly, as 100,000 uprooted Palestinians lived along the Arab shores of the Persian Gulf,⁴² and more subtly in its disquieting impact on popular Arab attitudes toward western national and commercial interests.⁴³ Accordingly, Whitehall harnessed its considerable talents and experience to bequeath an effective security force for the shaikhdoms.

General Willoughby's report had established the

⁴²This figure was obtained from panelist Dr. Hirsham Sharabi's individual comment, The Gulf: Implications of British Withdrawal (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Center for Strategic International Studies, 1969), p. 21. Alvin J. Cottrell, "Conflict in the Persian Gulf," Military Review 51 (February 1971): 40, tacitly acknowledges this inter-relationship of Palestine and the Gulf, noting that "the political acceptability of a U.S. presence or even visits in the Gulf must increasingly be measured in relationship to the U.S. position in the Arab-Israeli conflict."

⁴³For a further exposition see the testimony of Mr. Lee Dinsmore, U.S. Consul General of Dahrán, Saudi Arabia, and U.S. representative to the Gulf shaikhdoms and Oman during the British withdrawal period, contained in the U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. Interests in and Policy Toward the Persian Gulf, Hearings Before the Subcommittee on the Near East, 92nd Congress 2nd session, 1972, pp. 107-133.

ground rules for this aspect of withdrawal, stressing the threat of internal subversion and prescribing that the Trucial Oman Scouts (T.O.S.) "become the nucleus of the Union's armed forces."⁴⁴ As noted in Chapter Two, most of the rulers insisted on erecting individual armies. In Qatar, Abu Dhabi and Bahrain the order of battle quickly surpassed the modest levels envisioned by Willoughby.⁴⁵ The Shaikhs' apprehension over British withdrawal was almost palpable, as they anticipated the loss of insulating foreign troops with its concomitant domestic and international ramifications.

The most volatile shaikhdom, Bahrain, had been the scene of anti-Government riots in 1956 and 1966, and more serious disruptions were in store (March 1972). Iraqi-backed subversives, particularly among the Shi'ite elements in the politically sensitized labor class, made the island a "hotbed of radicalism."⁴⁶

⁴⁴John Duke Anthony, "The Union of Arab Amirates," Middle East Journal 26 (Summer 1972): 274.

⁴⁵R. Beasley, "The Vacuum that Must be Filled--the Gulf and Iran's Military Potential Assessed," New Middle 32 (May 1971): 38. Also see UAE, Ministry of Information, United Arab Emirates: First Anniversary (2 December 1972), pp. 7-10, and Qatar, Ministry of Information, Qatar into the Seventies (May 1973), pp. 20-26, 115-139.

⁴⁶The Financial Times, 25 April 1972, p.

They formed the Bahrain National Liberation Front, a clandestine movement with representative offices in Moscow, Beirut, Cairo and Damascus. A rival revolutionary group, composed mainly of Sunni Arabs, had Cairo's support. British intelligence was well aware of the potential for insurrections, leading British Ambassadors and Political Agents in the Gulf to seek some way to "incubate"⁴⁷ the shaikhdoms through the critical transition period. Previous military actions on behalf of Kuwait, following that state's independence in 1961, had set the precedent for a similar post-withdrawal commitment in the lower Gulf.⁴⁸

Whitehall reasoned that, with "the virtual certainty that the Soviet Union will seek to replace the British presence with her own,"⁴⁹ Moscow would actively

25. (Richard Johns).

⁴⁷Times (London), 12 January 1969, p. 9. (Winston S. Churchi-1), Sir William Luce, interview, confirmed this intitial predilection to adhere to a Kuwait-style scenario, extending the blanket of protection to all the shaikhdoms. Also see Sir William Luce, "Britain and the Persian Gulf," Round Table 227 (July 1967): 277-283.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Times (London), 12 January 1969, p. 9. (Winston S. Churchill).

promote an insurgency to attain that end.⁵⁰ Suspicions of malevolency grew when a Soviet cruiser, a missile-equipped destroyer and an anti-submarine escort called at ports in the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf in March 1968.⁵¹ Indeed, a Russian presence had already been established in one of the Gulf states, Iraq. Through an artful combination of arms supplies and economic assistance to Baghdad, "a state of affairs in which there is a certain state of dependence by the Ba'ath regime on Soviet help" had been created.⁵² Some observers scoffed at reports of Russian penetration, noting that the only client (Iraq) was "chronically coup-ridden and universally distrusted."⁵³ But the

⁵⁰See The Gulf: Implications of British Withdrawal (Washington: Georgetown University Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1969), pp. 110, for elaboration of the strategic rationale behind this alleged Soviet policy. Also see A. S. Becker and A. L. Horelick, Soviet Policy in the Middle East r-504-FF (Santa Monica: Rand Corp., 1970), pp. 115, that traces the evolution of the Soviet low-risk "spoiling" operation against the Baghdad Pact to their high-risk policy of the 1970s.

⁵¹Alvin J. Cottrell, "British Withdrawal from the Persian Gulf," Military Review 50 (June 1970): 21.

⁵²Aryeh Y. Yodfat, "Russia's Other Middle East Pasture: Iraq," New Middle East 38 (November 1971): 29.

⁵³Abraham S. Becker, Oil and the Persian Gulf in Soviet Policy in the 1970s P-4743-1 (Santa Monica: Rand Corp., 1972): 19.

Soviets were committed to a global naval capability. Their corresponding diplomatic and military advances, both in the eastern Mediterranean and Indian Ocean, had indicated their adoption of an expansionist policy.⁵⁴ Their arrival in the Gulf was the logical extension of that strategy.

If that did not suffice to disconcert the British officials, the Chinese Communists had tossed another red cap into the ring. The target for Peking's attack and London's concern lay to the south of the Trucial States, in Oman, where Sultan Said bin Taimur ruled a medieval autocracy under British protection. Since July 1958, Her Majesty's Royal Air Force (RAF) and Army had assigned advisors to the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) in exchange for base-rights at Salalah and on the Indian Ocean island of Masirah. The British had earlier helped to defeat tribal enemies of the Sultan in central Oman (See Chapter One), and more recently were employed against the separatist movement in the souther province of Dhofar.⁵⁵

⁵⁴Lawrence L. Whettan, "The Military Consequences of Mediterranean Super Power Parity," New Middle East 38 (November 1971): 19.

⁵⁵"The World: His Highness' mercenaries," The Economist 235 (4 April 1970): 31. Also see R. M.

The southern revolt had festered for several years but, after British forces withdrew from the Aden colony in 1967, a leftist regime took over the adjacent Peoples' Republic of South Yemen and the situation changed.⁵⁶ Some cross-border ideological links were already formed in 1965, when the movement became the Dhofar Liberation Front (DLP), a Nasivist-leaning local army. With the evolution of a Marxist government in Aden by 1969, both the military and political aspects of the rebellion intensified. The ideological orientation had already been shifting to the left, and the 1967 Peoples' Party Congress changed the DLF name to the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arab Gulf (PFLOAG). It was a Marxist-Leninist organization dedicated to communizing Oman and the neighboring Gulf shaikhdoms.⁵⁷ The same year, thirty Dhofari rebel

Burrell, The Persian Gulf (New York: Library Press, 1972), pp. 61-62. Also see James Morris, Sultan in Oman (London: Faber & Faber, 1964), for additional background.

⁵⁶An excellent account of this Marxist nation's genesis and prospects is offered in Joe Stork, "Socialist Revolution in Arabia," Middle East Research and Information Project 15 (March 1973): 1-25.

⁵⁷See Statement of the Second Congress, Hamrin (September 1968), contained in Dhofar, Britain's Colonial War in the Gulf: A Collection of Documents and Articles (London: The Gulf Committee, January 1972),

leaders went to Peking for political and guerrilla warfare training.⁵⁸

Area specialist, Dr. George Rentz, later testified that as many as "several hundred Chinese technicians and advisors" in Southern Yemen could be behind the infiltration of a Chinese presence into Oman through the PFLOAG.⁵⁹ Direct Moscow support was confined to Pravda reports of PFLOAG's popularity and of British brutality, and an invitation was extended for a Dhofari delegation to join the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee in the USSR.⁶⁰

SAF Commander, Colonel Teddy Turnhill, admitted that "this rebellion has become a revolutionary war different from just a rebellion to force the government to make changes. It sets out to change the entire

pp. 7-10.

⁵⁸R. P. Owen, "The Rebellion in Dhofar--a Threat to Western Interests in the Gulf," The World Today 29 (June 1973): 267.

⁵⁹United States Congress, House, The Committee on Foreign Affairs, The Middle East, 1971: The Need to Strengthen the Peace, Hearings Before the Subcommittee on the Near East, 92nd Congress, First Session, 1971, pp. 110-111.

⁶⁰Stephen Page, The USSR and Arabia: The Development of Soviet Policies and Attitudes Towards the Countries of the Arabian Peninsula (London: Central Asian Research Centre, 1971), p. 116.

social structure."⁶¹ Ironically, many of those rebel soldiers had learned their martial arts in the Trucial Oman Scouts (TOS). They now practiced their lessons with new equipment, including the ubiquitous Kalashnikov automatic rifle, Chinese-made versions of the SKS semi-automatic rifle and a host of other arms of Communist manufacture.⁶² In 1971, the British Officer-in-Charge of Omani pacification expressed the view shared by most British officials:

It is not so much the Dhofaris whom we are fighting, but rather the Chinese and the Soviets, united in a holy alliance to lay their hands on the wealth of this part of the world.⁶³

Great Britain's Security Role

One British response, widely criticized only for its tardiness, was to remove the chief source of local frustration, Oman's Sultan (See Chapter Two). Another

⁶¹Times (London), 3 August 1970, p. 6. (Paul Martin).

⁶²R. M. Burrell, p. 62.

⁶³Le Monde (Paris), 31 May 1971. Note the paradox between General Graham's assessment and that of Crozier Brian, "Tactics of Terror--where Reds Will Strike Next," U.S. News and World Report 70 (March 1971): 77, who wrote: "If the British withdraw /from the Gulf Shaikhdoms/ . . . That will remove the one real stabilizing factor in the area. Then we can expect a free-for-all involving the Chinese and the Russians." 1

was to stand aside (albeit reluctantly) as their designated custodial replacement, the Shah of Iran, joined the new Omani Sultan, Qabus, in militarily suppressing the Dhofari rebels.⁶⁴ The seeds for the portentous Persian re-entry onto the Arabian peninsula had been fittingly sown during secret meetings between Sultan Qabus and the Shah at the Persopolis celebration in October 1971.⁶⁵

The main British counter to the revolutionary menace was much subtler. Major General Sir John Willoughby, author of the report that recommended defense force composition for the Union of Arab Emirates, believed subversion to be the principal threat to Gulf stability. Before accepting the U.A.E. advisory post, he had provided the key to understanding how both the British and the emirs would guard their security:

. . . The Defense Commander will have the three armed forces which, in support of civil power, work as one force. But there is a fourth service, part armed forces and part civil power,

⁶⁴See Chapter Two. Also "The World: His Highness' Mercenaries," p. 31. Also Col. V. J. Croizant, "Stability in the Persian Gulf," U.S. Naval Institute 99 (July 1973): 49-59, describes Iran's military ascension in the Gulf and acceptance of the formerly British Gulf role.

⁶⁵R. P. Owen, p. 271. Also see Hossein Amirsadeghi, "Iran's New Outward Look--An Authoritative Report from Tehran," New Middle East 35 (August

and that is the Intelligence Service. For all purposes of support and allotment of priorities, it is quite essential that the Intelligence Service is accepted as the senior service. . . .⁶⁶

This conception became reality as Britain executed her withdrawal policy.

As discussed in Chapter Two (pages 71-77) the rulers had ignored General Willoughby's call for a single Union Defense Force. Each chose instead to retain his own dedicated unit. One British Trucial Oman Scouts (TOS) officer pointed out a salutary offshoot of that proliferation, noting "It is devilishly difficult to co-ordinate a coup in six armies."⁶⁷

The difficulty was compounded by the plethora of British officers and expatriates left to occupy responsible positions in the Gulf security establishment after 1971. In this manner, Whitehall partially mitigated the deleterious military effects of force dispersion by furnishing British commanding officers for the

1971): 9-11.

⁶⁶Major General Sir John Willoughby, "Problems of Counter-Insurgency in the Middle East," Journal of the Royal United Services Institute 113 (May 1968): 108.

⁶⁷Quoted by Richard Johns, "The Emergence of the United Arab Emirates," Middle East International 21 (March 1973): 9.

larger shaikhly armies. These men were accustomed to mutual cooperation, and supplemented that operational advantage through an intricate and effective system of intelligence liaison. About forty percent of the officers in the Abu Dhabi Defense Force, by far the most powerful in the shaikhdoms, were British. The ADDF was commanded by a seconded British officer, and the key staff positions, operations and intelligence, were also held by the British. The Trucial Oman Scouts had always been British-officered, and nearly one hundred continued to serve when the T.O.S. became the Union Defense Force after independence. Dubai's Defense Force, also under British command, had about ten British officers assigned. Though none served in the armed forces of Sharjah or Ras al Khaima, both those armies were committed to the Union Defense Force in any major contingency and would therefore come under British control.⁶⁸

Complementing the uniformed official pervasion, the British expatriates who had headed the police forces and vital Special Branches (police-intelligence) in the shaikhdoms prior to withdrawal remained behind to provide continuity."⁶⁹ This residual military and civilian

⁶⁸Phillip Griffin, interview.

⁶⁹Michael Burrell, interview.

presence comprised in effect the "senior service" to which General Willoughby had alluded in his 1968 article (see above page 149).

Trucial Oman Scouts

Turning over the Trucial Oman Scouts did not proceed as smoothly as had the more critical insertion of British officials within the emirate security forces. Essentially a mercenary constabulary, the transfer of soldiers posed only mechanical problems. But there were enough to cause a last-minute embarrassing delay. An equitable gratuity had been paid to each man by the TOS Commander-in-Chief, Sir Geoffry Arthur, who points to a ninety percent re-enlistment rate into the Union Defense Force as proof that "it wasn't too much and it wasn't too low."⁷⁰ Still the administrative shift of military authority proved to be a more complicated exercise.

Under the British code of military justice, discipline in the ranks of the TOS had been maintained for nearly two decades. The Union of Arab Emirates, however, lacked an Army Act to codify the rights and responsibilities of the soldiers. When the British

⁷⁰Sir Geoffry Arthur, interview.

Gulf Political Residency on Bahrain drafted an appropriate law for the U.A.E., the rulers refused to enact it, pending confirmation by their Council of Ministers. Sir Geoffry could not release his force without the law. Once again British action would have to await an Arab consensus, for at independence the ministries had not been officially assigned.⁷¹ As an interim measure, the force was placed under a seconded British Colonel, who headed the Union's Defense Committee. It took until December 22, 1971, before the Political Resident was able to hand over the Trucial Oman Scouts to the Union President.⁷² This was fully three weeks after the exchange of notes that ended the special treaty relationship between the United Kingdom and the Trucial States.⁷³

The Exchange of Notes

Those notes, individually signed and exchanged by

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²David Ledger, "Gulf Union," Middle East International 9 (December 1971): 6. Also the date was supplied by Sir Geoffry Arthur, interview.

⁷³For text see, Great Britain, Foreign Office, Exchange of Notes Concerning the Termination of Special Treaty Relations Between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Trucial States (Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al Qaiwain, Ras al Khaima and Fujairah), Treaty Series N. 34 (1972), Cmd. 4941, 1 December 1971, pp. 20.

Sir Geoffrey Arthur with each emir, terminated British protection. It was considered "inconsistent with membership in a Union which has full international responsibility as a sovereign and independent State . . ."⁷⁴ Together with the Treaty of Friendship that was made the following day at Dubai between the United Kingdom and the six member states (Ras al Khaima did not join the Union until February 1972) of the United Arab Emirates, Britain rescinded the Treaty system that had prevailed for more than a century and a half.

This also capped a Foreign Office project launched in August 1970. Every operative treaty and protocol between Her Majesty and the shaikhs had been reviewed to assess what legal readjustments were necessitated by their ending. Sovereign rights had been ceded to Britain, and provisions were taken to bring future governmental interactions into a more conventional arrangement. Throughout the withdrawal period and even beyond, various accords were reached for future bilateral relations, ranging from overflight rights to commercial affairs.⁷⁵ These compacts actually replaced

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 3.

⁷⁵Anthony Reeve, interview.

the Treaty system that was ended in 1971.

The Treaty of Friendship pledged its signatories to "a spirit of close friendship . . ." and a "common interest in peace and stability of the region . . ." Mutual "consultation" in time of need was the sole obligation either signatory incurred.⁷⁶ In August 1971, Bahrain was granted the treaty, after Shaikh Isa bin Solman al-Khalifa declared his island fully independent.⁷⁷ The next month, Qatar predictably followed the Bahraini lead, determined to "implement its full authority externally as well as internally."⁷⁸ Sir William Luce revealed that the six federated shaikhdoms had to be restrained from formally emulating Qatar and

⁷⁶Great Britain, Foreign Office, Treaty of Friendship Between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United Arab Emirates, Treaty Series No. 35 (1972) Cmd. 4937, 2 December 1971, p. 3.

⁷⁷Isa bin Solman al-Khalifa, official statement issued at Rifa Palace, Bahrain, 14 August 1971. In the announcement, Shaikh Isa declared Bahrain's: "continued readiness to join the Federation of Arab Emirates or the new State of Arab Emirates as soon . . . as its Government is set up and its structure stands upon the sound and constitutional bases and principles which the people of this Arab area believe in . . ."

⁷⁸Quoted from the Qatar Proclamation of Independence, in the Times (London) (Special Report), 5 September 1971, p. IV. See also Great Britain, Foreign Office, Exchange of Notes Concerning the Termination of Special Treaty Relations Between the United Kingdom of

Bahrain too quickly. Had he not defused the islands dispute first, the Shah would have wrecked any union not under British protection.⁷⁹ The Foreign Ministry of the UAE confirms that in July 1971, the six had reached agreement, having "fully realized the balance of give and take in the Union."⁸⁰ But they had not been dealing with the Shah as had Luce.

The Arab readiness for independence, notwithstanding, there were enough unresolved details from the British perspective to forestall closure of the Gulf Residency until March 26, 1972.⁸¹ No longer would that office serve the British interest. The activities described in the foregoing pages had been intended to make it redundant.

Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the State of Qatar,
Cmd. 4849, 3 September 1973.

⁷⁹Sir William Luce, interview.

⁸⁰United Arab Emirates, Foreign Ministry, United Arab Emirates, September 1972, p. 14.

⁸¹Sir Geoffrey Arthur, interview.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE ASSESSMENT

Securing British Interests

This thesis set out to determine how Great Britain perceived, pursued and protected her interests in the Persian Gulf after the 1968 decision to withdraw all permanent British forces from the area by 1971. The previous chapters described a transitional process. The decision to withdraw, first taken by the Labor Government and then reluctantly accepted by their Conservative successors, actually preceded the formulation of a withdrawal policy. That in turn emerged in much the same way as had the Treaty System itself, in pragmatic response to conditions confronted by men charged with executing their Governments' decisions. Indeed, the policy and process of withdrawal were inextricably interwoven as soldiers and statesmen sought to ensure an abiding role in the Gulf for their country. In less than four years, they moved their Government from the status of protector to that of first among equals in the international relationships of her former protectorates.

The Withdrawal Policy

What was Great Britain's preeminent policy objective during withdrawal? Historically British officials concerned with the Persian Gulf had consistently sought the same long-term goal, regional stability, though their immediate interests varied widely. Original concerns with maritime trade and imperial routes gave way increasingly to a British industrial society's insatiable thirst for the oil that was so plentiful along the Persian Gulf. By 1973, Sir William Luce would say: "Oil is what the Gulf is all about."¹ This conception dominated British Gulf policy through most of the twentieth century. Her interest was oil, how best to reach it, to profit from it, to control it. British planners wrestled with the problem, seeking the equation that would supply their answers. Oil was the constant in all policy proposals, and the least common denominator of all the suggestions was stability. With it came the physical security that was the essential precondition for guaranteeing the free flow of Gulf oil for British needs. Without it, the vulnerable petroleum

¹Sir William Luce, speech given before the Middle East Institute Annual Conference of 1973, Washington, D.C., 28 September 1973.

installations and transport systems were not expected to survive let alone to profit. Oil-rich but economically stagnant Iraq was easily cited as an all too proximate example of the dangers inherent in political instability.

The Pax-Britannica had reigned in the Persian Gulf for over 150 years and, with the coming of the oil era, had been extended over the strip of land that lay behind the coastal commercial enclaves. The stability it brought was largely attributed to the continuing presence of British naval and military forces, a factor first introduced in quest of maritime peace. The 1968 decision to withdraw them was really taken for reasons--economic, political and military--essentially out of the context of the Persian Gulf (see Chapter One). Yet those arms had traditionally enforced the peace that freed the oil; oil was a vital component of the British economy. Whitehall, that is the men responsible for executing the decision to end the Treaty System, recognized the need for maintaining regional stability. Therefore removing the British military forces required some compensatory formula to achieve that goal be devised. The practical policy that evolved aimed at approximating the political status quo that prevailed under the Treaty System, whereby Britain's position and

power could be sustained. 7

The Pursuit of British Interest

That policy was pursued (as described in chapters two, three and four) between January 1968 and December 1971. Whitehall attempted to establish a milieu conducive to ongoing tranquility, based on three pillars. First, regional cooperation was to be encouraged by removing the tangible sources of Iranian and Arabian resentment. Territorial conflicts demanded consideration, as did prospective inter-governmental relations between the shaikhdoms and the other Gulf states. Since the "special relationship" that encompassed the nine emirates had excluded even local "foreign" powers, normal diplomatic contacts : never existed. Indeed, British protection had blanketed several regional differences and obviated the need to reach compromises. Examples include Saudi Arabia's claim to Buraimi, Iraq's to Kuwait, and Iran's to Bahrain. Such matters could no longer be ignored.

The second policy pillar concerned the preparation of the nine shaikhdoms for the projected new circumstances. The British protectorates were to be formed into a viable polity, able to fully participate in Gulf politics

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in such a way as to not rely on Great Britain's armed forces.

There was also a third pillar on which the withdrawal policy stood. Although inherent in the conduct of international affairs by any state, it was uniquely emphasized by Whitehall in this case. This was to maximize British influence, not simply in conjunction with the dual policy aims mentioned above, but, more specifically, in the determination of the Gulf's political direction following the exodus of British forces in 1971.

The Accomplishments

What had actually been accomplished between the January 1968 decision and Sir Geoffry Arthur's departure from the Persian Gulf in 1972? The preceding chapters limn the events, but their meaning is open to conjecture. From the perspective of Sir William Luce, Britain's withdrawal had been "reasonably successful." As he saw it, she had retained access to and participation in the lucrative marketing of Gulf oil, and a responsive security establishment remained to protect that asset. Potentially debilitating international disputes had been resolved or abated. Indigenous "stable

and progressive" Arab governments were left to rule the shaikhdoms, as independent participants in the community of nations. Great Britain had bequeathed stability in her own interest, and to the mutual benefit of all the peoples of the Gulf.²

A radically different view, shared by many Communist and Leftist writers, interprets the British withdrawal differently. They hold that Whitehall had sustained a three-tiered, neo-colonial strategy to:

1. produce puppet regimes backed by foreign-manned military units,
2. guaranteed by the reactionary regional powers, and
3. encircled by an outer ring of Anglo-American military bases.

Britain continued to "rule behind a facade of independence,"³ what one Soviet analyst termed a "pocket empire," from Oman.⁴

A case can be made for both interpretations, given

²Ibid.

³Fred Halliday, "Oil and the Revolution in the Persian Gulf," Ramparts 9 (April 1971): 54.

⁴G. Dynov, "Persian Gulf Countries at the Cross-Roads," International Affairs (Moscow) (March 1973): 54.

their respective political points of departure. Recognizing that, this assessment will indulge neither the apologists nor the polemicists, but will address the question, how well did Whitehall's efforts serve the withdrawal policy objective, stability in the Persian Gulf?

The three-pillar withdrawal policy described above was only partially successful. Major Arab-Iranian disputes over Bahrain and Abu Musa were effectively negotiated if not wholly resolved, but the forceful Iranian occupation of the Tunbs islands represented a shortcoming of British diplomacy that had dangerous ramifications.

Inter-Arab cooperation had been facilitated by the British, as shown by the joint Saudi and Kuwaiti response to the withdrawal. That had been coordinated with Whitehall's attempts to assist the Gulf emirs in adapting to the new situation. The deposition of the Omani Sultan might also be included among Britain's positive contributions toward the long-term regional stability. Yet these cannot obscure the failures. The inability to accomodate all sides in the Buraimi issue belied ominous inter-Arab discord, and cast a long shadow over the newly independent shaikhdoms. It

blocked Riyadh's diplomatic recognition of the Union of Arab Emirates, and diverted the federation's limited human resources to a hopeless military purpose.

Nor was the creation of a political structure that could adequately rule and represent the ex-Protectorates, Britain's second policy pillar, fully accomplished. The formal transition from the Treaty System to normalized international relations between London and the shaikhdoms was substantially completed. Only certain technical rearrangements were carried over into 1972. Legally, Her Majesty's jurisdiction was retroceded in due course. The problem posed by Qatar's early independence was more clerical than judicial, and was expeditiously handled by all concerned. The exchange of minor, functional responsibilities went less smoothly, but was effected well in advance of the administrative deadline.

Beyond that formal transition, Great Britain's role in the transfer of political power to the shaikhdoms was ambiguous. Officially, the Government applauded the Arab initiatives toward consolidating their position but, in practice, British withdrawal policy became enmeshed in her own domestic politics. The Labor Government's volte face in announcing the 1968 decision, coupled with the Conservative Party's proclaimed

intention to reverse the withdrawal, virtually neutralized Whitehall's support for the union. The original discreet distance British diplomats kept from the budding federation was misinterpreted by the rulers as disinterest and, when more active British participation did come, it came too late. Predictably, the nine disparate shaikhdoms fell short of the ideal union so ardently desired by their fellow Arabs.

They emerged instead in 1971 as three separate states. Their leaders were only marginally cooperative, with populations whose greatest similarity lay in their diversity. Wasteful duplication of prestige developmental projects marked the waning years of Britain's "special relationship," and minimal economic integration remained a goal long after the British departure from the Gulf. The decline of Great Britain's intercessionary power in the shaikhdoms was shown clearly as she lost her dominant trade position. Even prior to 1968, this was being eroded by European and Japanese entrepreneurs. By 1971, those advantages Britain retained were less a function of Whitehall's perspicacity than of the individual acumen of British businessmen.

Since stability had been the fundamental objective, it is not surprising that Britain's most notable

legacy would lie in the field of defense. Securing what political institutions evolved during withdrawal would both maintain a semblance of the previous regional configuration and provide the means for perpetuating British influence in the Gulf. Although General Willoughby's masterplan for a single union defense force had been rejected by the rulers, a crude integration of the various shaikhly guards under the former Trucial Oman Scouts was postulated in post-withdrawal contingency plans. Bahrain and Qatar formed independent, well-equipped fighting units under British tutelage, while seconded and contract British officers permeated the command structure of the United Arab Emirate defense establishment.

These military officials were complemented by their civilian countrymen, who served in highly responsible police and counter-intelligence capacities. This variation of the British presence injected command coordination, intelligence liaison and a uniform military approach across the spectrum of shaikhly differences, jealousies and suspicions. Their familiarity with and bias toward British-manufactured equipment also facilitated the sizeable arms sales that further increased Britain's leverage in the security realm.

Most relevant was the placement of personnel within the security establishment. Their influence on the rulers, and their expertise applied against the forces threatening Gulf stability, combined to create a credible alternative to Britain's military forces in the area. Whitehall maintained control of security policy, retaining as many British links as possible, commensurate with the altered international status of the shaikhdoms. This does not belie any insidious British ploy, for from both Whitehall's perspective and implicit in the rulers' acceptance of the arrangement, the oft-stated goal of peace in the Gulf was being served.

The Final Score

How well did Britain's withdrawal policy and process serve her national interests after 1971? Since concern for petroleum was central, it needs to be asked to what degree the product of the withdrawal years met the problem. Certainly, in the immediate aftermath, the oil continued to flow. But, before a sufficient time elapsed to properly evaluate the system Britain bequeathed, the new international relationship was overtaken by events. In 1973, the combined effects of the

world energy crisis and the Arab oil embargo pushed Great Britain to the brink of economic disaster, while powerful if subtle encroachments on the regional political arrangements eroded the tenuous power-base of the security establishment. Could there have been an alternative Gulf policy in the year 1968 through 1971 that might have avoided this? The answer must be an unequivocal no. Far from a failure of diplomacy, the Gulf had been caught up in the dynamics of transcendent consumer-producer state relationships.

Yet out of this there comes one final question, the answer to which exceeds the scope of this paper. Had colonial policies, not only in the Gulf but wherever Western society interacted with less economically developed peoples, been based more on humanity than expediency, could the present international polarization have been averted? Is this the price for failing to impart the elements of progress and modernity in lieu of imposing the force of arms to ensure stability?

This observation is not intended to be critical of British efforts expended between 1968 and 1971. In fact, given the limited time available to formally conclude the Treaty System, the magnitude of the regional political adjustment that was required and the

complicating extrinsic factors that applied, Whitehall's accomplishment was remarkable. British diplomats performed in the vortex of Gulf politics, within range of Soviet cruisers and Mao's thoughts, implementing a profound decision that had been taken out of the local context. That they succeeded as well as has been described testifies to their professionalism.

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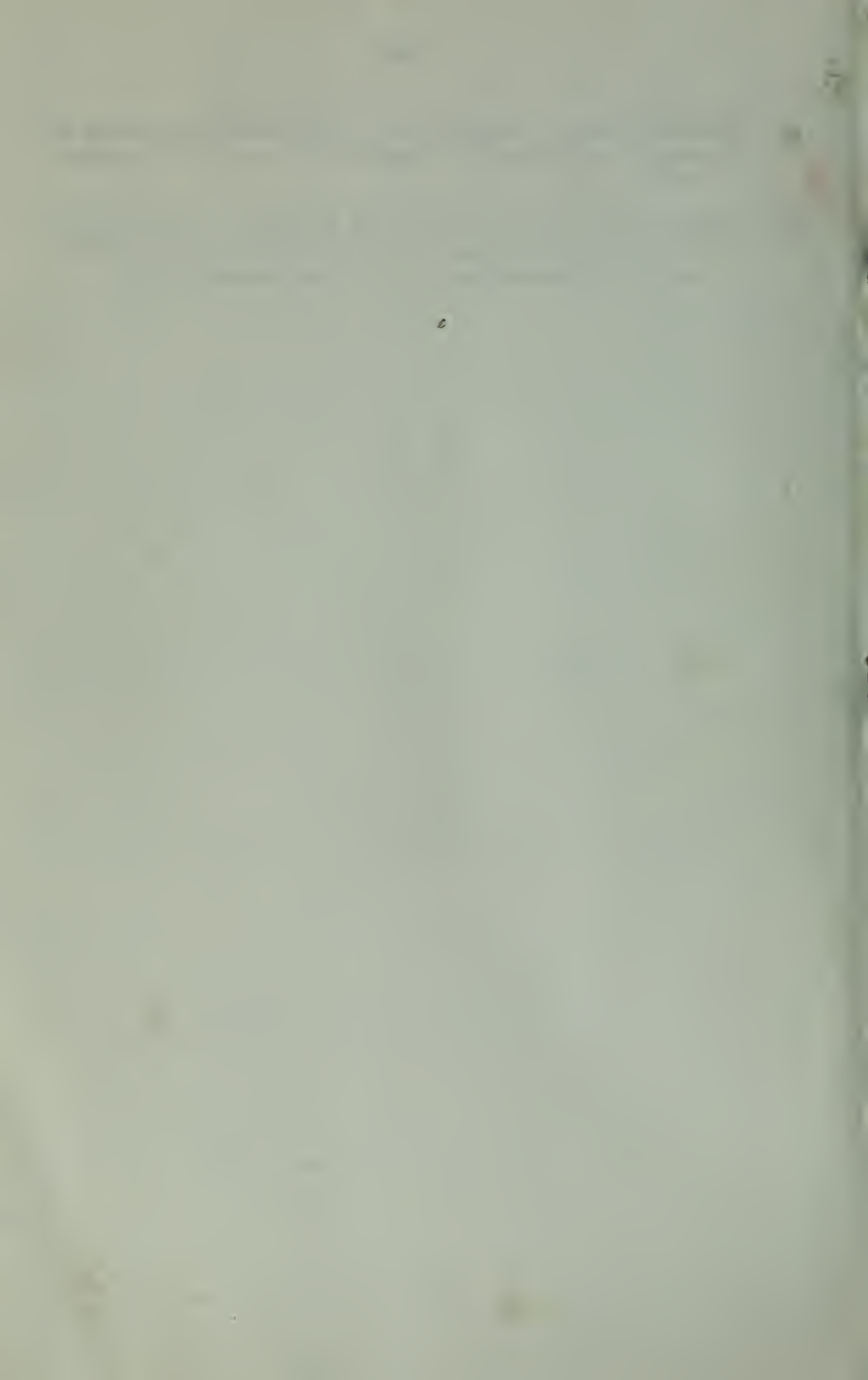
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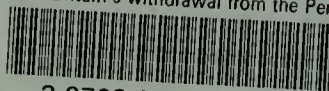
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